THE CARS OWNERS LOVE MOST P. 50

BANKS WITH GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE

BEST PASTA SAUCE YOU CAN BUY P. 34

CR Consumer Reports®

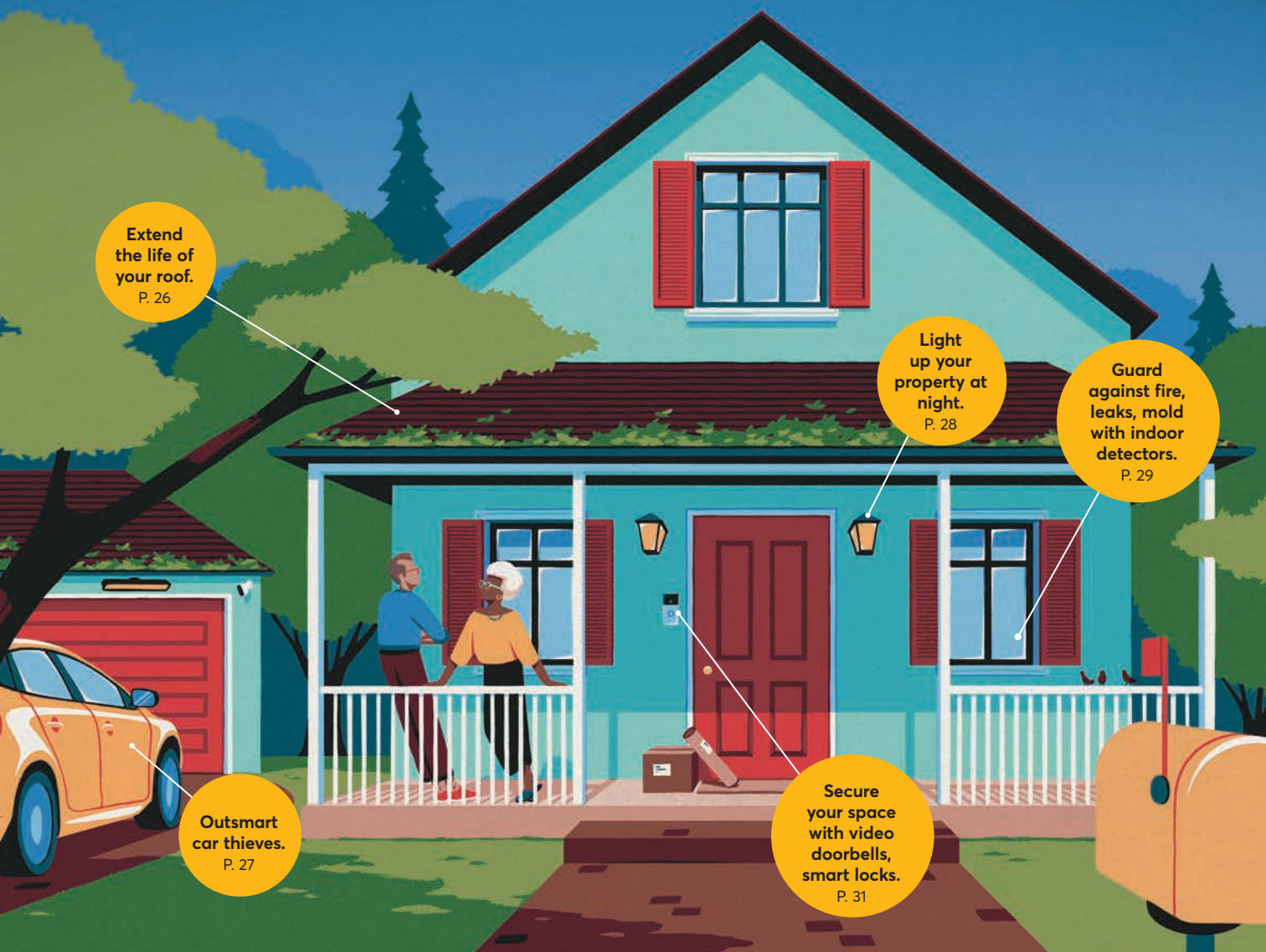
MARCH 2023

RATINGS & REVIEWS

- Air Fryers
- Refrigerators
- Bargain Laptops
- Smart Speakers
- Vacuums
- Electric Toothbrushes

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR HOME

Safeguard your biggest asset from extreme weather, broken pipes, the threat of theft, and much more.


Extend the life of your roof. P. 26
Light up your property at night. P. 28
Guard against fire, leaks, mold with indoor detectors. P. 29
Outsmart car thieves. P. 27
Secure your space with video doorbells, smart locks. P. 31

Thank You!

Our donors and philanthropic partners play a critical role in creating a fairer, safer, and healthier world. We are immensely grateful to the more than 600,000 people and organizations who supported us during fiscal year 2022.

JUNE 1, 2021 - MAY 31, 2022

$100,000+

Alfred P. Sloan Foundation • Breakthrough Energy • Climate Imperative Foundation • Craig Newmark Philanthropies • Flourish Ventures' donor advised fund at Silicon Valley Community Foundation • Ford Foundation • Kapor Center • Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting • U.S. Energy Foundation • Anonymous (4)

$25,000 to $99,999

Woody Carter • Thomas Michalski • Mozilla Foundation • Dr. Cherri M. Pancake • Susan & Charles Sawyers • Union of Concerned Scientists • Anonymous (2)

$10,000 to $24,999

Robert & Jacquelin Apsler • Dr. Donna Fletman • Richard L. Frazier • Anki & Larry Gelb • Sheila, Dave & Sherry Gold Foundation • Doug Huestis & Barbara Klencke, MD • Richard D. Lee & Vera M. Lee Foundation, Gerald A. Sherwin, Trustee • Robert McAllan • David A. & Janet Rice • David & Marian Rocker • Terry & Ginger Smith • Sabino Strippoli • Arthur & Charlotte Zitrin Foundation • Anonymous (7)

$5,000 to $9,999

Robert G. Andrews • Scott & Ellie Boxer • W. Ford Calhoun, Ph.D. • Herbert L. Caplan • John E. Carnes, Ph.D. • Ann & Jac Connelly • Ruben F. Davila-Perez • Susanne & Douglas Durst • Mr. Keith A. Gould • Frank & Rose Greene • Stephen P. Hoover, Ph.D. • Dr. Kenneth M. Koch, MD • Larry Lehrner & Shelley Berkley • Stewart Macaulay • Dorothy Davis Smith • Dr. P. R. Sundaresan • Marta L. Tellado • Tomas M. Torres • Stephen & Lisa Weinroth • James & Debbie White • Robert S. Wilson • King & Linda Won • Anonymous (25)

$1,000 to $4,999

Alice R. Abbott • Dr. Sumanth Addanki • Robert H. Adkins • Mr. John Almquist • Joaquin Alvarado • Glen Y. Arakawa • Marcia Aronoff • James Avedikian • Lawrence M. Axelrod • The Roberta C. Baade and George F. Yee Charitable Fund • Mr. Gerard M. Baillely • Patricia & Owen Baynham • James Beck • Sandi Behnken • Cecilia Benner • The Beverstock Family Fund • Nancy Blachman • Mr. & Mrs. William Blair • Clara R. Bleak • Gerd Blobel • Richard Boettcher • Robert Brager & Judith Golding • Jill & Christopher Brooks • Mr. & Mrs. Evan Buck • Malcolm Buxton • Mr. & Mrs. Robert Calman • Guy N. Cameron & Megan C. Balterman • John & Mary Camp Foundation • James & Kathleen Cavanaugh • Gordon Chaffee & Nancy Ellen Kedzierski • Keith & Elaine Christian • Dan & Terry Church • Eleanor Preston Clark • Theodore Cohn • Sharon Coats & Richard Blankenbecler • Dr. Evan Colgan • Stephen H. Colitz • Kay Collins • Perry Cooper • Ms. Deborah Cowan • Lisa Cribari & Raymond Infarinato • Brian & Kathy Cunningham • Kevin & Sandi Curtis Charitable Fund • Ms. Sherry L. Cyza • Judith Daykin • Robert & Linda DeLap • Ms. Susan Denny & Mr. Christian Nolen • Mr. & Mrs. Gerard Desmarais • Dr. Elias & Wendy Dickerman • Jon Doellstedt • Drexler Estate Fund • Laura A. Edlin • Tom & Jackie Edwards • Tracey Edwards • Paul & Rosemary Eide • Kathleen Engel & Jim Rebitzer • Diane & Ralph Engel • Elliot & Eileen Entin • Sergey Falko • Margaret & James Feldick • Don Ferber • Hannah & Marvin Finnley • Gerald Fleharty • Cameron Fosterling & Ernie Schneps • Gerald E. Frazier • Paula Gehr • J.B. Geisel-Sorrell • Alan W. George • Randy Glick • Diana & Kenneth Gometz • Linda Grabel • Nancy Grant • Alan L. Graves • Robert C. Greenberg • Ms. Kathleen Griffin • Jim & Lois Hanko • Robert & Paula Hardison • Malloy T. Harris Jr. • Michael & Rita Hartzog • Mel A. Hawthorne • Helms Helps Foundation • Help Is Passed On Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation • Shirley & Barnett Helzberg Jr. Donor Advisory Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Kansas City • Donnie L. & June J. Henley • Douglas C. Hess • Richard E. Hill • Robert & Jane Hite • Donna & Peter Hollinger • Joanne Hovis • Rachel A.M. Howald • Frederick B. Howard • Fong Hsu • Vicki Huff & Eric Boerwinkle • Dr. Dale & Mrs. Cindy Hutchens • John Huysmans • John & Debra Iannucci • Carol Izumi • George W. Jackson Jr. • Vidula Kirtikar & George Jacob • Jarosewycz Family Gift Fund • Deane & Ottie Johnson • Michael Jones & Deborah Zoller • Philip & Miranda Kaiser • Karen & Wayne Kanemasu • Francine & Richard Kauffunger • P. M. Kealoha • Thomas D. Kearns & Michele Tortorelli • Marlyn L. Kefauver • Margot & Bob Keith • Jamie Kelleher • Kevin & Merry Kelly • Mr. & Mrs. Thomas A. Kevern • John G. Kiefer • Dale E. Kipp • Gary & Hazel Kitts • James Dan Knifong, Sr. & Margaret Porter • Michael and Ina Korek Foundation • Phyllis Jo Kubey • Daniel J. LaFond • Kenneth & Amy Landrum • Fred & Jan Laughlin • Irene & Randy Leech • David Leiwant • Bonnie Lemert • Corina & Greg Linden • Daniel Lindsay & Kelcie Gosling • Martha & Daniel Lips • The Lo Charitable Fund • Annette LoVoi & Jim Marston • Christian Lutkemeyer • E. D. Lynch • P.A. Macholl • Robert M. Mains • John & Susi Manley • John & Marcy Manning • Mr. & Mrs. Joseph A. Mark • Mary L. Marlow • John & Melanie Martin • Mary Ellen Maun • Anne Maura • Richard Arthur McCrone • Liam McCormack & Katherine Sroczynski • W. Ronald McElcannon • Eric Allman & Kirk McKusick • Daniel & Debby Meyer • LuAnn & Joe Meyers • Raymond Miller • Keith Moe • Debra & Rick Morris • Thomas & Joan Mullin • Mr. Lee Nadelman • Sharon L. Nelson • Joseph E. Nordsieck & Melanie A. Ringer • Bradley K. Cruz & Barbara Norton • Jay Novik • Mr. & Mrs. Todd J. O'Connell • Frans & Helen Officer • Mr. Richard J. Omlor & Dr. Elizabeth A. Hardy • Bonna L. Oyer • Mr. Rex Patterson • John R. & Elizabeth G. Peters • Carolyn Phelps • Gregory L. Piccininno • Lisa Powell • Ariadne H. Prater • Harry & Liz Pritchard • Gina Purlia Johnson & Kent Johnson • Jane Pyenson • Lawrence Ragard • Maria & Fred Ragucci • Thomas Ray • Mr. & Mrs. Mark J. Reicher • Dr. Ann S. Rice • Randy Richards • Wayne Rickman • Carlin Ridpath & Louis Delcampo • John & Maria Riley • John B. Robertson, Jr., M.D. & Paula J. Allred • James D. Robinson • Francois & Beth Rodigari • Mike Rosenzweig • Herbert & Ellen Rotfeld • The Lawrence Sanders Foundation • Siram Satyanath • George A. Sawyer • Sidney Schnoll & Phyllis Hirschfield • Dr. Joel Schrank & Jackie Schrank • Mary Schroth • Teresa & Dan Schwartz • Michael H. Schwartz • Thomas M. Scott • Curtis L. Scribner • Juliet Sears LeDorze • George & Olivia Sheckelton • Brent Sieling & Megan Schliesman • Harold & Dr. Eileen Rice Sirkin • Donna & Jerry Slepack • Dr. & Mrs. Brent D. Slife • Johnny Smelz • Donald G. Smith, Jr. • Robert A. Solomon • Alicia C. (Chris) Soule • Wayne Spaeth • Paul K. Stangas • Joel & Judy Stettner • Taren Stinebrickner-Kauffman • Max Stolz, Jr. • Sabrina & Chi Sung • Harold & Melissa Symmonds • Dan & Ai Tauber • Ellen Taus • Shar Taylor • Roger Telschow & Frances Gatz • Gerald J. Thain • John & Nancy Thurow • R. T. Tomono • Dr. Caroline Urvater • Richard Van Slyke • Astrid D. Vermeer, MBA • Ron Vitt • Dick & Marcia Volpert • Robert & Linda Wadalavage • Theodore C. Wagenaar • Larry Waldron • Ann & William Walker • Mr. & Mrs. Edward Wallace • Doris & Clark Warden • Don & Linda Ware • Thomas A. Wathen • Sanford Waxer • Ms. Gay Wayman • Eric Wayne • Peggy & Lawrence West • Warren & Penny Wood • Woods & Gil Family Foundation • Jeanne Wootters • Ty & Jackie Yun • Rick T. Zawadski • Albert Ziegler • Richard Zurek • Anonymous (459)

New Charitable Gift Annuitants

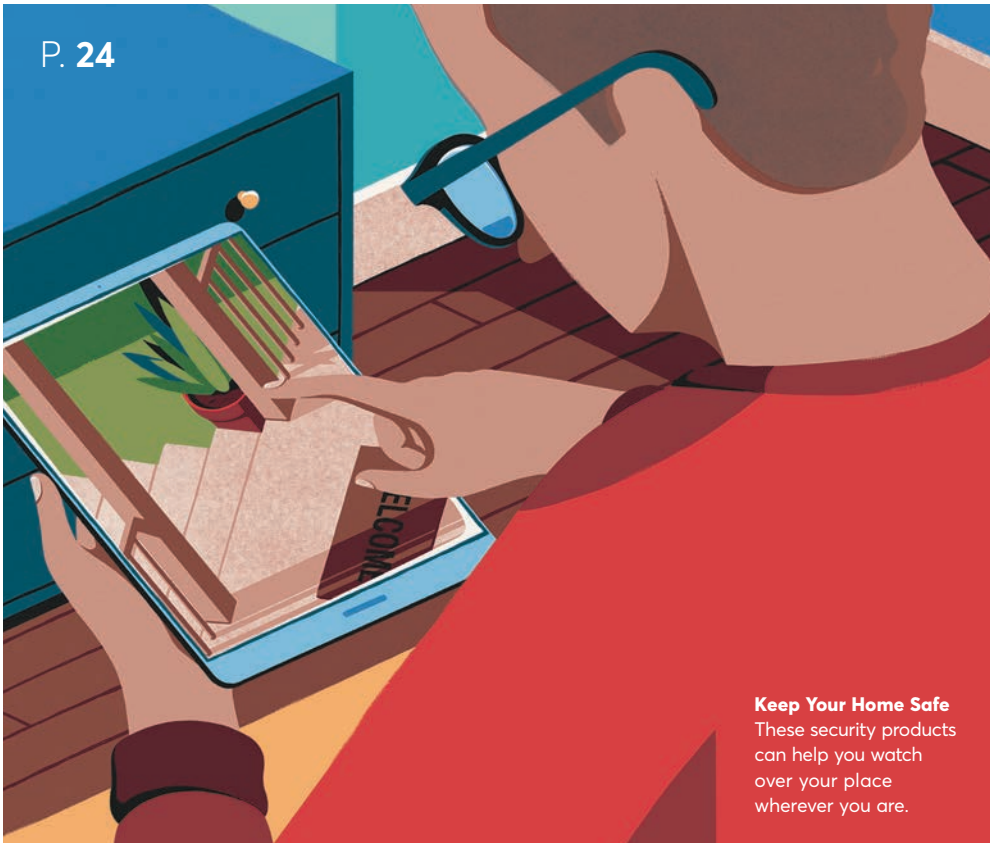
Judith L. Corley • David H. Le • Martha R. Williams • Joseph A. Wilson, II • Anonymous (4)

New Legacy Society Members

Keith & Karen Bishop • Ed Bradley • Jerry Brown • Katrina Cengeri Greguska • Roz Dolid • Beth Draco • Molly Hopper • Kimmy Jiao • Kay Koellner • Holly Luna • Pat Mathison • Tamirose Palmer • Dave Perilstein • Terry Scott • Donna Short • Emma Skinner • Cathie Stevens • Carol & Jack Vreeland • Elijah Walker • Jay Wratten • Anonymous (161)

Contents

MARCH 2023, VOL. 88 NO. 3



Keep Your Home Safe
These security products can help you watch over your place wherever you are.

24 **Protect Your Home (Inside and Out)**
Simple preventive measures–and the best new tech–can help keep your biggest asset secure from damage and theft.
RATINGS

34 **The Best Pasta Sauce on Store Shelves**
Yes, you can get a delicious, healthful sauce in a jar. Find out which brands impressed our testers (and which didn't).
RATINGS

40 **Testing for Toxins**
Worried about dangerous chemicals in everyday products? These consumers had such concerns–and took it upon themselves to investigate. Here's how you can make a difference, too.

44 **Choose the Right Bank for You**
Learn whether your financial institution is working for you and your money–and where to find a better match if it isn't.

PRODUCTS RATED IN THIS ISSUE

AIR FRYERS
P. 9

ELECTRIC TOOTHBRUSHES
P. 18

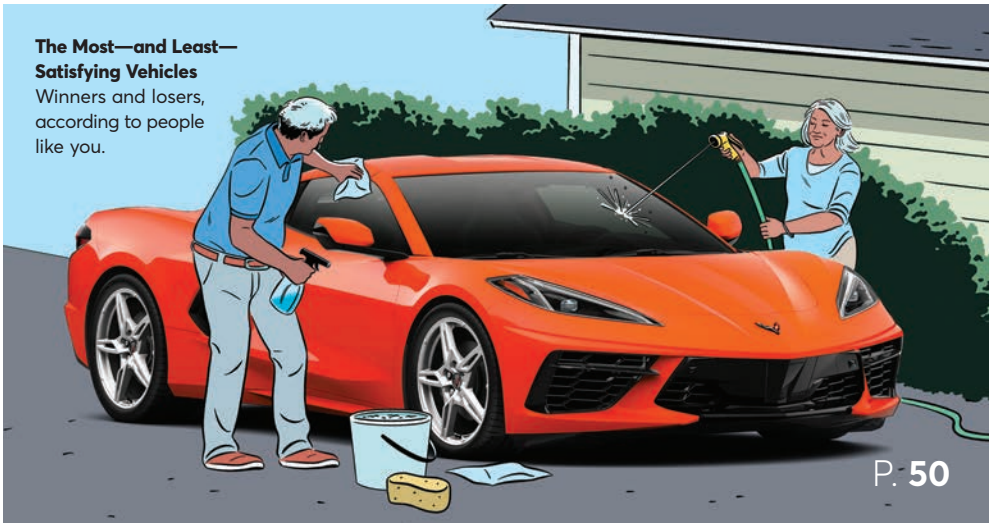
VIDEO DOORBELLS
P. 31

PASTA SAUCES
P. 34

KIA NIRO
P. 57

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID DORAN

Contents



The Most—and Least—Satisfying Vehicles
Winners and losers, according to people like you.

P. 50

5 **Building a Better World, Together**
Making e-bike batteries safer, preventing auto crashes, and the consumer protections needed on buy now, pay later loans.

6 **Your Feedback**
Readers' comments about our recent content.

17 **Recalls**

60 **Index**

61 **Selling It**

DEPARTMENTS & COLUMNS

8 **What We're Testing in Our Labs ...**
Air fryers, upright vacuums, side-by-side refrigerators, and more.
RATINGS

10 **Ask Our Experts**
Guidance on the best over-the-counter headache remedies, cleaning a stinky garbage disposal, and keeping windshield wipers from freezing.

P. 16

11 **CR Insights**
The most durable full-sized luggage, showerheads with great water pressure, the best pickleball paddles, and more.
RATINGS

PRODUCT UPDATE

18 **The Secrets to Cleaner, Healthier Teeth**
From the best toothbrushes to the most effective ways to floss, our expert advice will help you care for your pearly whites the right way.
RATINGS

IN EVERY ISSUE

4 **From the President: Consumer-Powered Change**
We're working to hold the marketplace accountable–and we need your help.

ROAD REPORT

49 **Ahead of the Curve**
Auto ratings, news, and advice.

50 **The Cars People Love Most**
Our owner satisfaction survey reveals the vehicles that delight–or disappoint.
RATINGS

56 **Your Recall Questions Answered**
Get the intel you need on those important auto recall announcements.

57 **Road Test**
We evaluate the Kia Niro, Honda CR-V, Lucid Air, and Nissan Ariya.
RATINGS

ABOUT CONSUMER REPORTS Consumer Reports is an independent, nonprofit organization founded in 1936 that works side by side with consumers to create a safe, fair, and transparent marketplace. To achieve our mission, we test thousands of products and services in our labs each year and survey hundreds of thousands of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We pay for all the products we rate. We don't accept paid advertising.

In addition to our rigorous research, investigative journalism, and consumer advocacy, we work with other organizations, including media, consumer groups, research and testing consortiums, and philanthropic partners. We also license our content and data, as well as work with business partners to offer shopping and other consumer services, and may receive fees from these programs. We maintain a strict separation between our commercial operations and our testing and editorial operations. Our testing and editorial teams decide which products to test and review; our external business partners or other third parties do not dictate or control these decisions. Lastly, these partnerships and programs do not constitute CR's endorsement of any products or services.

For more information, go to **CR.org/about.**

HOW TO REACH US Write to us at Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703, Attn.: Member Support. Or call 800-333-0663.

TO SEND A LETTER TO THE EDITOR Go to **CR.org/lettertoeditor.**

FOR NEWS TIPS & STORY IDEAS Go to **CR.org/tips.**

For **Selling It,** send items to **SellingIt@cro.consumer.org.** See page 61 for more details.

ACCOUNT INFORMATION Go to **CR.org/magazine** or call 800-333-0663. See page 3 for more details.

RATINGS Overall Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100. We rate products using these symbols:

WORSE — BETTER

1974

Car Safety Restraints for Children

SERIOUSLY INJURED

POSSIBLY INJURED OR NOT SERIOUSLY KILLED SIDE CRASH

PROBABLY KILLED

PROBABLY KILLED

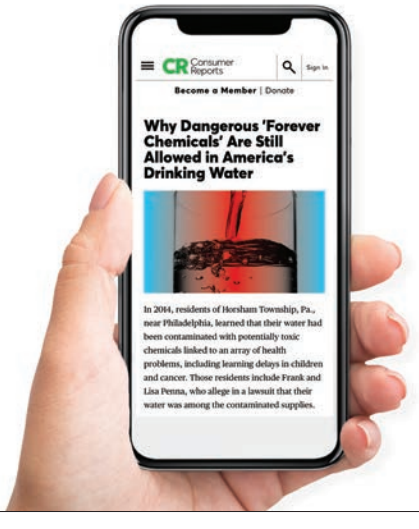
On Your Side—Then & Now

Everyday decisions are more important than ever. From navigating a health crisis to buying a car or making safe food choices, you can rely on the trusted expertise of CR. But we can't do it without you. Your contributions provide us with the additional support that makes our nonprofit work possible.

Learn more at cr.org/supportCR

CR

2023


CR Consumer Reports
Sign In
Become a Member | Donate
Why Dangerous 'Forever Chemicals' Are Still Allowed in America's Drinking Water
In 2014, residents of Horsham Township, Pa., near Philadelphia, learned that their water had been contaminated with potentially toxic chemicals linked to an array of health problems, including learning delays in children and cancer. Those residents include Frank and Lisa Penna, who allege in a lawsuit that their water was among the contaminated supplies.

CRM33ASN

CR Consumer Reports®

Member Support You can call us about your membership or donations at **800-333-0663**.

Or go to CR.org/magazine to • Renew or pay for your current magazine • Give a gift • Change your address • Report a delivery problem • Cancel your magazine

Or write to us: Consumer Reports Member Support
P.O. Box 2109, Harlan, IA 51593-0298
Please include or copy address label from issue.
(Allow four to six weeks for processing.)

Price In U.S., $6.99 per issue, special issues $7.99. In Canada, $7.99 CAN per issue, special issues $8.99 CAN (Goods and Services Tax included, GST #127047702). All other countries add $10 per year to the U.S. price for shipping and handling.

Back Issues Single copies of previous 12 issues, $8.99 each (includes shipping and handling). Please send payment to Consumer Reports, Attn.: Member Services, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703.
Other ways to get Consumer Reports on the go: Apple News+, Google Play, Kindle, Nook, Readly, and Zinio.

Permissions Reproduction of Consumer Reports in whole or in part is forbidden without prior written permission (and is never permitted for advertising purposes). For questions about noncommercial, educational/academic uses of our content, please submit requests to **CR.org/licensing.**

Mailing Lists We exchange or rent our print postal mailing list so that it can be provided to other publications, companies, and nonprofit organizations that offer products or services through direct mail. If you wish to have your name deleted from our list, please send your address label with a request for deletion from outside use to Consumer Reports, P.O. Box 2109, Harlan, IA 51593-0298, or you can go to CR.org and click on "Do Not Sell My Personal Information" at the bottom of the page. We do not exchange or rent email addresses. You can review our complete privacy policy regarding Consumer Reports information products, services, and programs at **CR.org/privacy.**

Consumer Reports (ISSN 0010-7174) is published monthly, except twice in December, by Consumer Reports, Inc., 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703. Periodicals postage paid at Yonkers, N.Y., and at other mailing offices; Canadian postage, at Mississauga, Ontario (Canadian publications registration number 2665247, agreement number 40015148).
Title Consumer Reports is a federally registered trademark in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Contents of this issue copyright © 2023 by Consumer Reports, Inc. All rights reserved under international and Pan-American copyright conventions.

CR's No Commercial Use Policy To view the policy, go to **CR.org/nocommercialuse.**

Contributions Consumer Reports is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works side by side with consumers to create a fairer, safer, and healthier world. Contributions are tax-deductible in accordance with the law. Donations of commonly traded securities or real estate will be accepted and immediately converted to cash. For additional information, email **donorservices@cr.consumer.org.** To donate, please send your tax-deductible contribution to Consumer Reports, Attn.: Donor Services, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703 or go to **CR.org/donate.**

Charitable Gift Annuity Establishing a Consumer Reports Charitable Gift Annuity is an ideal way to accomplish your personal financial goals while supporting the mission of Consumer Reports. For additional information, please contact us at 877-275-3425 or **legacy@consumer.org.**

Consumer Reports' Staff operates under contract between Consumer Reports and The NewsGuild of New York Local 31003, CWA.

Members Send address changes to Consumer Reports, P.O. Box 2109, Harlan, IA 51593-0298. If the post office alerts us that your magazines are undeliverable, we have no further obligation to fulfill your magazines unless we have a corrected address within two years.

POSTMASTER Send all UAA to CFS (see DMM 507.1.5.2).

NON-POSTAL AND MILITARY FACILITIES Send address corrections to Consumer Reports, P.O. Box 2109, Harlan, IA 51593-0298.

CANADA POST If copies are undeliverable, return to Consumer Reports, P.O. Box 481, STN MAIN, Markham, ON L3P 0C4.

Consumer Reports is a member of Consumers International, a federation of more than 220 consumer organizations from more than 115 countries working to protect and empower consumers throughout the world. For information, go to **consumersinternational.org.**

Please Remember CR in Your Will For information about how to make a bequest to Consumer Reports, please contact us at 877-275-3425 or **legacy@consumer.org.**

Consumer-Powered Change

CONSUMERS ARE a force to be reckoned with—like the "citizen testers" in this month's issue, who test for toxins in dishes, dental floss, and even sports bras (see page 40). And collectively, consumers are driving national change. In December, we saw a victory that would not have been won without the parents who helped secure national standards to prevent the sale of unstable furniture. After tragically losing their own children, they banded together, showing incredible courage and fortitude in using their voices to advocate for America's most vulnerable.

There's no better changemaker than you, and that's why CR is working with consumers to expose frustrating issues and dangerous products—so we can make the marketplace fair and safe.

Our community reporters collected samples from water systems that serve over 19 million people. Subsequent testing revealed dangerous levels of arsenic, lead, and PFAS ("forever" chemicals). After the findings were published, the Environmental Protection Agency issued an advisory for four PFAS chemicals in drinking water, lowering the level of contamination below which adverse health effects are not expected.

People like you make these actions possible, so we're finding more ways to empower people as drivers of change. Community reporters in Mississippi are building on our water study by collecting samples to test the safety of their local systems. And in the Brooklyn borough of New York City, residents are using air quality monitors to measure pollution around new Amazon facilities.

I encourage you to go to **CR.org/communityreports**, where you can sign up to be a community reporter for one of our next consumer change efforts, including a campaign to make digital services cost less and devices less pricey to repair, which would be a big sustainability win.

With your voice, your passion, and your power, we can change the world for all consumers.

Marta Tellado

Marta L. Tellado,
President and CEO
Follow me on Twitter
@MLTellado

CR Consumer Reports®

President and CEO Marta L. Tellado

Acting Head of Content Jen Shecter
Editorial Director, Print Ellen Kunes

Deputy Editors, Print Amanda Lecky, Diane Umansky, Natalie van der Meer
Design Director Mike Smith **Creative Director, Brand** Young Kim
Associate Design Director Sheri Geller
Art Directors Tammy Morton Fernandez, Ewelina Mrowiec, Lisa Slater
Photo Editors Lacey Browne, Emilie Harjes, Karen Shinbaum

Senior Director, Content Development Glenn Derene
Associate Director, Content Development Althea Chang-Cook
Enterprise Kevin Doyle, Editor; Perry Santanachote, Writer/Reporter
Special Projects Joel Keehn, Director; Margot Gilman, Associate Director; Lisa L. Gill, Lauren Kirchner, Brian Vines, Kaveh Waddell, Deputies; Scott Medintz, Writer
Editorial Director, Digital Erle Norton
Senior Director, Acting Head of Testing and Insights Lilian Kayizzi
Senior Director, Product Testing Maria Rerecich
Associate General Counsel Camille Calman

CARS: ***Editors/Writers:*** Keith Barry, Jeff S. Bartlett, Jonathan Linkov, Mike Monticello, Benjamin Preston ***Auto Test Center:*** Jake Fisher, Senior Director; Jennifer Stockburger, Director ***Product Testing:*** Michael Bloch, Michael Crossen, Steve Elek, Kelly Funkhouser, Gordon Gingras, John Ibbotson, Alex Knizek, Anita Lam, Ryan Pszczolkowski, Mike Quincy, Gabriel Shenhar, Shawn Sinclair, Emily A. Thomas, Joe Veselak ***Policy Lead:*** William Wallace

HEALTH & FOOD: Lauren F. Friedman, Content Lead ***Editors/Writers:*** Trisha Calvo, Kevin Loria, Catherine Roberts ***Policy Lead:*** Brian Ronholm

HOME & APPLIANCE: Sara Morrow, Content Lead ***Editors/Writers:*** Joanne Chen, Tanya A. Christian, Jennifer Cook, Mary Farrell, Keith Flamer, Gideon Grudo, Paul Hope, Deb Silber, Tobie Stanger, Daniel Wroclawski ***Product Testing:*** John Galeotafiore, Jason Holmes, James Nanni, Testing Leads; John Banta, Sarah Bogdan, Susan Booth, Tara Casaregola, Lawrence Ciufo, Bernard Deitrick, Cindy Fisher, Paolo Fu, Kathleen Halevah, Rich Handel, Misha Kollontai, Ginny Lui, Joan Muratore, Joseph Pacella, Christopher Regan, Matt Schimmenti, Frank Spinelli, Kenneth Sutton, Dave Trezza ***Market Analysts:*** Mark Allwood, Stacy Canova-Turner, Kelly Moomey, Courtney Pennicooke, Antonella Pomilla, Marion Wilson-Spencer ***Policy Lead:*** William Wallace

MONEY: ***Editor:*** Margot Gilman ***Policy Lead:*** Delicia Hand

TECH: Jerry Beilinson, Content Lead ***Editors/Writers:*** Nicholas De Leon, Yael Grauer, Melanie Pinola, Chris Raymond, Allen St. John, James K. Willcox ***Product Testing:*** Richard Fisco, Glen Rockford, Michael Visconti, Testing Leads; Elias Arias, Antonette Asedillo, Steve Blair, Claudio Ciacci, Charles Davidman, David DellaRocca, Henry Parra, Justin Stewart, Richard Sulin, Maurice Wynn ***Market Analysts:*** Min Kim Bryant, Cesar Carroll, Odalys Grieco, Nish Suvarnakar ***Policy Lead:*** Justin Brookman

Chief Scientific Officer James H. Dickerson
Product Sustainability Shanika Whitehurst, Associate Director
Food Safety James E. Rogers, Director; Tunde Akinleye, Eric Boring, Amy Keating, Sana Mujahid
Product Safety Ashita Kapoor, Associate Director; Juan A. Arguello

Content Operations Robert Kanell, Director
Copy Editing Leslie Monthan, Copy Chief; Noreen Browne, Alison France, Wendy Greenfield
Fact Checking & Research David Schipper, Associate Director; Tracy Anderman, Joy Crane, Sarah Goralski, Christine Gordon, Karen Jacob
Planning & Production Nancy Crowfoot, Associate Director; Eric Norlander, Manager; Letitia Hughes, Terri Kazin, Aileen McCluskey
Premedia William Breglio, Associate Director; Eugene Chin, Anthony Terzo

Photography John Powers
Imaging Francisco Collado

Consumer Engagement Testing Charu Ahuja, Director; Linda Greene, Dana Keester, Paul Ritchey
Statistics & Data Science Jody Porrazzo, Director; Debasmita Das, Kristen Dorrell, Dina Haner, Keith Newsom-Stewart
Survey Research Debra Kalensky, Associate Director; Noemi Altman, Dave Gopoian, Kendra Johnson, Martin Lachter, Jane Manweiler, John McCowen, Adam Troy, Tian Wang, Tess Yanisch

Consumer Insight Frank Yang, Associate Director; Ipsita Arora
Member Support Sue Melfi, Director; Donna Murianka
Marketing Dawn Nelson, Senior Director
Print Supply Chain Steven Schiavone, Director
Administration Dawn Yancy Elleby

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENTS: Chief Strategy Officer Jessica Freireich; **Chief Membership Officer** Lauren Stanich; **Chief Financial Officer** Eric Wayne
VICE PRESIDENTS: Chief People Officer Genea O. Bell; **Financial Planning & Analysis** JoAnne Boyd; **Chief Marketing Officer** Jose Carbonell; **Chief Digital Officer** Jason Fox; **New Products & Services** Esther Han; **General Counsel** Michael Hubner; **Innovation Lab** Ben Moskowitz; **Chief Diversity Officer** Rafael Pérez; **Chief Research & Analytics Officer** Kristen Purcell; **Chief Social Impact Officer** Sharee McKenzie Taylor; **Special Projects** Shar Taylor

PHOTO: VICTORIA WILL

Making E-Bike Batteries Safer

E-bike sales have boomed since the pandemic hit, as many consumers look to spend more time outdoors and to avoid public transit. Unfortunately, safety standards have lagged.

A CR investigation, published in December on CR.org, found that little has been done to protect consumers after a rash of deadly fires around the U.S. were tied to lithium-ion and other types of high-energy-density e-bike batteries.

Most such incidents appear to be connected to cheap, poorly made batteries, which remain on the market because of two overlapping regulatory problems: 1) The Consumer Product Safety Commission, the federal agency charged with overseeing some 15,000 product categories (including e-bikes), lacks the resources and power to carry out its mandate effectively; and 2) there's a loophole that allows many products worth less than $800 coming from overseas—including cheap e-bikes and e-bike components—to enter the U.S. without safety screenings by border agents.

CR's investigation caught the attention of CPSC Commissioner Mary T. Boyle, who released a statement echoing CR's conclusions and calling for urgent action. Later in December, the agency called on more than 2,000 manufacturers, importers, distributors, and retailers to comply with voluntary safety standards for battery-powered products or face possible enforcement action.

25,000

HIGH-ENERGY BATTERIES reportedly overheated or created fire hazards from 2012 to 2017.

Source: Consumer Product Safety Commission.

CR will monitor industry response and continue urging policymakers to give the CPSC the authority and funding it needs to protect consumers. Meanwhile, consumers can learn how to prevent e-bike fires at **CR.org/ebikesafety**.

CALL TO ACTION

Buy now, pay later loans, which typically let you pay for purchases in bi-weekly installments, are a convenient way to ease short-term budget problems—but can also hit consumers with unexpected interest charges, late fees, credit score hits, and a range of hassles related to returns and disputed charges, a recent CR analysis found. (To learn more, see page 12.) We're now calling on the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to put into place strong measures to ensure that consumers are treated fairly. Add your voice by signing our petition at **CR.org/bnplrules**.

Preventing Auto Crashes

WHAT'S AT STAKE

As the popularity and size of pickup trucks and SUVs have grown, so too has a deadly safety problem: the huge blind zones in front of these vehicles, where drivers are unable to spot children and other pedestrians. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says these "frontovers," where slow-moving vehicles strike pedestrians the drivers didn't see, caused an average of more than 14,000 injuries and more than 380 deaths per year between 2016 and 2020. Most victims were 6 or younger.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

CR has been drawing attention to frontovers. A recent CR evaluation showed that full-sized pickup trucks–the most popular autos on the market–can have blind zones 11 feet longer than a car's and 7 feet longer than an SUV's. And a recent NBC News video report featuring CR car safety experts and filmed at our auto test facility vividly demonstrated the problem by showing a row of 10 children in front of a popular pickup truck–and the driver wasn't able to see any of them. A separate CR study found that pickups are less likely than cars and SUVs to have standard safety features, such as automatic emergency braking with pedestrian detection, which could prevent frontovers.

CR wants automakers to address the problem. In October, Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal introduced a CR-endorsed bill that would order NHTSA to require that vehicles be equipped with technology to improve visibility and avert frontover incidents.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Sign our petition urging carmakers to take steps now, at **CR.org/frontovers**.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

CR'S GUIDE TO POPULAR
SUPPLEMENTS
MOST RELIABLE CARS, SUVS & TRUCKS
AGE-PROOF YOUR HOME
SAVE BIG ON GROCERIES
CR Consumer Reports
OUR GUIDE TO POPULAR
SUPPLEMENTS
WHAT WORKS • WHAT DOESN'T • WHAT ISN'T SAFE TO TAKE

Our January 2023 cover story, **"CR's Guide to Popular Supplements,"** examined the remedies many people turn to for strengthening immunity, boosting memory, and more. Our readers shared their thoughts. To add your own, head to **CR.org/popularsupplements**.

I, FOR ONE, am glad we have supplements. My mother and her mother had a genetic disease that caused a loss of calcium to their bones, and without the help of a specialist who agreed that calcium supplements were necessary, they would have been wheelchair-bound for decades—and I, as well.
–Trudi Trahan-upchan, via CR.org

EDITOR'S NOTE *You're right. Although many people take supplements that aren't necessary, some of them—such as calcium supplements—have been shown to be helpful in certain situations. But CR advises that you always check with your physician before taking supplements, especially if you also take any prescription drugs.*

CONSUMER REPORTS AGAIN provides information about supplements but does not help consumers by letting us know which producers and brands are of the highest quality and which are not. Does more expensive mean better quality? I would find an evaluation of the supplement providers and manufacturers to be much more valuable than these blanket "don't take" and "okay to take" generalities.
–Michael Glaser, via CR.org

EDITOR'S NOTE *CR has tested supplements in the past. But January's article was based on published scientific research along with our own consumer surveys. As noted in the "What to Know Before You Take That Supplement" section on page 27, looking for a seal from the U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP) and other trusted organizations can help you verify that a supplement contains what's advertised on the label. You can find a list of USP-verified supplements at quality-supplements.org.*

IN YOUR JANUARY article "CR's Guide to Popular Supplements," regarding vitamins, you should have mentioned that it's very important for vegans to take B-12.
–Wayne Kern, Timonium, MD

EDITOR'S NOTE *People with certain restricted diets, such as vegans, may be missing out on some key vitamins. If that's the case for you, consult a doctor or dietitian about how to get the vitamins you need from fortified foods—those that have vitamins added to them—or from vitamin supplements. Vitamin B-12, for example, is plentiful in meat, milk, and eggs, but it's not found in any plant foods. That's why the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends that vegans eat foods fortified with B-12, such as soy milk and certain cereals, or take a B-12 supplement.*

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

BEST STORE BRANDS

IN "STORE BRANDS We Love, (and a Few We Don't)" in the January issue, I noticed that my favorite brands of peanut butter were not among those tested. Peter Pan wasn't, and neither was Jif. Those are the best two peanut butters of all time!
–Diane Stubbs, Gautier, MS

EDITOR'S NOTE *In most cases, we used the top-selling brand of each product type as our "name brand." For peanut butter, we tested the No. 2 brand, Skippy, instead of the No. 1, Jif, because at the time we purchased our samples, Jif peanut butter was linked to an outbreak of salmonella poisoning (now over) and had been recalled. Peter Pan, by the way, is fourth in terms of sales after Jif, Skippy, and private label peanut butter products.*

AUTO RELIABILITY

IN "NEW CARS You Can Count On" in the January issue, you gave the 2023 Lincoln Nautilus an above-average rating for predicted reliability, indicated by the light green circle and a score of 73 out of 100 points. How is this possible when in your 2021 Auto Issue you rated the reliability for the Nautilus with a red circle, which indicates a well-below-average grade, and then in the 2022 Auto Issue you gave it an orange circle, which indicates a below-average grade?
–Geoff Bijas, Bluffton, SC

EDITOR'S NOTE *CR conducts a new survey each year. When there are sufficient responses, we average the data from our reliability surveys over the three prior model years to make our prediction for the new model year. So reliability predictions for 2023 factor in results from the 2020, 2021, and latest 2022 survey. The reliability rating for the 2023 Lincoln Nautilus, however, is based only on 2020 and 2021 data, which have shown above-average reliability; we have insufficient data for 2022.*

CONNECT WITH US

FACEBOOK
fb.com/consumerreports
fb.com/SomosCR

YOUTUBE
/consumerreports

INSTAGRAM
@consumerreports

TWITTER
@consumerreports
@SomosCR

PINTEREST
/consumerreports

LINKEDIN
/company/consumer-reports

DISHWASHER RINSE AIDS

ON PAGE 8 of your January issue, you answered the question "Do I need to put a rinse aid as well as detergent in my dishwasher?" by explaining that adding a rinse aid can prevent "annoying water spots." What we throw away (plastics, chemicals), wash away, and flush away often ends up negatively impacting our environment. Has CR determined the environmental impact of the chemicals in rinse aids?
–Andy Phelan, Holliston, MA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Most rinse or drying aids are surfactants–compounds that react with water to reduce surface tension–which can be "ecotoxic." One common rinse agent–sodium tripolyphosphate–has been described by the Environmental Protection Agency as toxic to the environment. You can look for that ingredient listed on a product's label. There are some rinse aids (made by Seventh Generation and Ecos, among others) that are claimed to be biodegradable and nontoxic, but CR hasn't evaluated them. The mineral content or hardness of your water at home can also cause spotting on glassware, so addressing that condition can help without the use of any additional chemicals.*

HOW MUCH SUGAR IS IN WHOLE-WHEAT BREAD?

In "Store Brands We Love" in the January issue, there was no mention of sugar content in the whole-wheat bread section. In my experience, bread of all kinds typically carries high levels of sugar, and it is difficult to find whole-wheat bread with less than 4 grams of sugars.
—David Dodsworth, Punta Gorda, FL

EDITOR'S NOTE *We did address sugar content in the article. None of the seven breads we featured had more than 2 grams of added sugar per slice (the limit our nutritionists recommend). The lowest was Walmart Great Value 100% Whole Wheat Bread, with less than 1 gram per slice. Aldi L'oven Fresh 100% Whole Wheat Bread, Target Market Pantry 100% Whole Wheat Bread, and Trader Joe's Whole Wheat Bread Sliced all have 1 gram per slice.*

HOME SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

THE JANUARY ARTICLE "How to Age-Proof Your Home" is very valuable. One particular warning is key: Avoid tripping over an open dishwasher door. Having experienced several such accidents, I think that appliance manufacturers should implement safety technology as automakers have. For example, why not have flashing lights at the outer corners of the doors?
–C. Warren Axelrod, Great Neck, NY

EDITOR'S NOTE *An open dishwasher can certainly pose a tripping hazard, and it's always best to close the door after loading or unloading. If you live with small children (or they're frequent visitors) add a child-safety lock to the door to keep them from opening or standing on the door. And if you're in the market for a new one, avoid a model with a door that opens at the end of the cycle to aid drying.*

THANKS FOR THE article in the January issue "How to Age-Proof Your Home." I live alone in a multilevel home and I recently broke my ankle. I was fortunate to be able to install a chair lift, which gave me full use of my bedroom, bath, and office, which are upstairs. It wasn't inexpensive but not as bad as I thought.
–Alan Berman, Marietta, GA

CLARIFICATION

Our January 2023 cover story on supplements featured photographs of CBD-infused gummy bears with the letter A on their bellies. Albanese Confectionery Group, Inc., the maker of the "gummi with the A on its tummy"™, does not manufacture or sell CBD-infused gummy products.

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Smart Speakers With Quality Sound

WE TESTED: 43 models
WE TEST FOR: Sound quality, including how a speaker compares with top-rated reference models in our lab; ease of use; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 54
Range: 38-68

NICE PRICE & WORKS WITH ALEXA
Amazon Echo Studio
$160

68 OVERALL SCORE

WORKS WITH BOTH GOOGLE & ALEXA
Sonos Move
$400

68 OVERALL SCORE

SUPER EASY TO USE (WORKS WITH ALEXA)
Bose Home Speaker 500
$380

65 OVERALL SCORE

Hand Mixers

WE TESTED: 10 models
WE TEST FOR: How fast a mixer can make whipped cream, how well it mixes cookie dough, its noise level, convenience of features, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 64
Range: 47-79

WONDERFUL AT WHIPPING
KitchenAid KHM926
$100

79 OVERALL SCORE

TERRIFIC AT MIXING
Breville Handy Mix Scraper BHM800SILUSC
$130

70 OVERALL SCORE

BARGAIN BUY
Cuisinart Power Advantage HM-50
$40

64 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

I already have a stand mixer. Do I need a hand mixer, too?

THAT DEPENDS. IF your stand mixer lives on your counter and you use it a lot, you may not need a handheld mixer. But if you're short on counter space, hand mixers can be a convenient alternative. A great hand mixer can take on a lot of the same jobs as a stand mixer, though they're especially good at lighter-duty tasks, like beating eggs or mixing pancake batter. Some hand mixers, like the Breville above, are even powerful enough to make cookie dough. A hand mixer may also be a faster, easier-to-clean option when you only need to whip up a small bowl of something. Or it can be a useful addition when your stand mixer is already in use creating another recipe.

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH

WORSE BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org**.

Air Fryers

WE TESTED: 56 models
WE TEST FOR: How easy it is to use a fryer's controls and to clean it, the noise level, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 69
Range: 47-81

SMALL & BEST OVERALL
Dash Digital Tasti-Crisp Air Fryer (2.6-Quart)
$70

81 OVERALL SCORE

SLEEK MIDSIZED FRYER
Williams Sonoma Open Kitchen Digital Fryer (4.3-Quart)
$100

77 OVERALL SCORE

EXTRA-LARGE CROWD-PLEASER
Wolfgang Puck 9.7QT Stainless Steel Air Fryer
$120

76 OVERALL SCORE

Upright Vacuums for $250 or Less

WE TESTED: 29 models
WE TEST FOR: How well each model cleans carpets and bare floors, including picking up pet hair; how easy it is to push, pull, and carry the vacuum; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 62
Range: 40-75

STRONG SUCTION (BAGGED)
Kenmore Pet Friendly 31140
$250

74 OVERALL SCORE

BAGLESS BARGAIN
Shark Navigator Lift-Away NV352
$190

72 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT ON BARE FLOORS & FOR PET HAIR (BAGGED)
Hoover WindTunnel Max UH30600
$210

70 OVERALL SCORE

Laptops for $600 or Less

WE TESTED: 40 models
WE TEST FOR: Performance while running applications, games, and web browsing; quality of the display; the machine's portability; battery life; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 58
Range: 33-72

LOTS OF MEMORY & STORAGE
Lenovo Ideapad 1 15 (512GB) 15.6"
$600

70 OVERALL SCORE

TRAVEL-FRIENDLY TOUCHSCREEN
Microsoft Surface Laptop Go 2 (128GB) 12.4"
$600

69 OVERALL SCORE

MOST BUDGET-CONSCIOUS
Acer Aspire 5 A515-56-363A (128GB) 15.6"
$400

64 OVERALL SCORE

Side-by-Side Refrigerators

WE TESTED: 42 models
WE TEST FOR: Thermostat control; temperature uniformity; energy efficiency; ease of use, including storage options; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 63
Range: 47-78

CONVENIENT DOOR-IN-DOOR DESIGN
LG LRSDS2706S 36-inch
$2,000

76 OVERALL SCORE

QUIET & A LARGE FREEZER
LG LHSXS2706S, 36-inch
$1,800

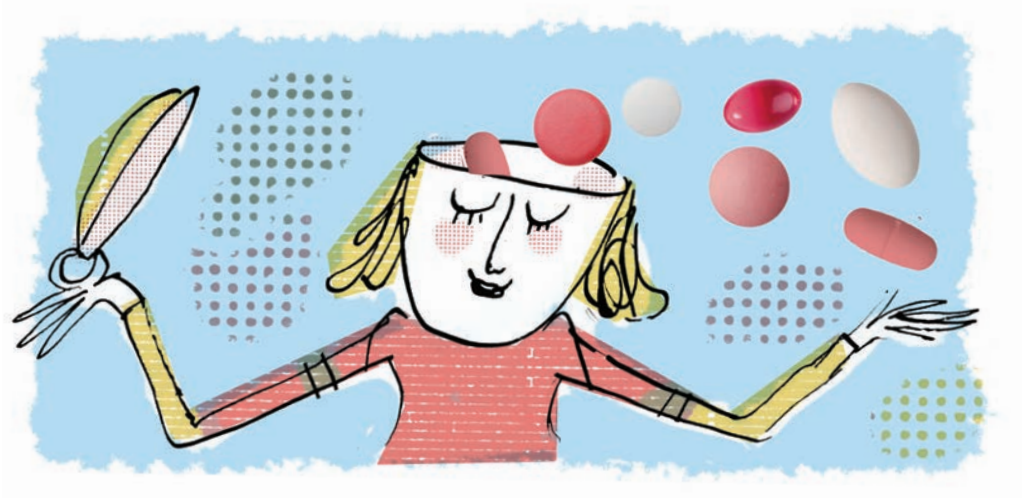
74 OVERALL SCORE

TOP PICK FOR SMALL KITCHENS
Amana ASI2175GRS 33-inch
$1,350

65 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Stick Vacuums & More



Which over-the-counter medicine is most effective for stopping a headache?

TWO OF THE most common over-the-counter drugs you can take if you suffer from occasional tension headaches are acetaminophen (usually known by brand name Tylenol) and ibuprofen (sold under the brand names Advil and Motrin). While both will help ease a headache, a few studies show that ibuprofen may be more effective in treating tension-type headaches, says Lauren Natbony, MD, at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. In one 1996 study, patients who took 400 mg of ibuprofen experienced more (and quicker) pain relief than those who took 1,000 mg of acetaminophen.

And because it has an anti-inflammatory effect, ibuprofen may also be more effective for those experiencing neck pain.

People who have cardiovascular disease may want to avoid ibuprofen because it can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke—especially when taken long-term. (That risk is possibly somewhat lower with naproxen, known by the brand name Aleve, another anti-inflammatory drug that can provide relief for aches and pains.)

For all painkillers, it's important to follow the dosage limits on the label because taking too much ibuprofen or naproxen puts you at risk of gastrointestinal bleeding, and taking too much acetaminophen can put you at risk of liver damage. (Aspirin, by the way, can also provide pain relief, but it's not considered as effective as acetaminophen and ibuprofen and can cause gastrointestinal bleeding even at a low daily dosage.) If you're unsure which pain relief medication is right for you, talk with your doctor.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

My garbage disposal smells bad. How can I clean it?

DISPOSALS CAN MAKE food scraps disappear with the flick of a switch—but over time food debris can build up inside and start to stink up your sink. If you use your disposal daily, we recommend cleaning it once a week with a few simple ingredients. Put a handful of ice (about six cubes) into the disposal and run it: This should help break up bits of food that may be stuck down there. Once the ice is gone, mix 1 teaspoon of bleach with a cup of water and pour it into the garbage disposal, says Larry Ciufo, who oversees CR's garbage disposal lab testing. "Use a cap or cover over the opening to keep bleach from splashing back up at you—and then run it for a few seconds," he says. If you still smell something, it's probably caused by food buildup on the splash guard—the black rubber panel that sits atop your sink's drain hole. You can scrub it with warm water and baking soda or toss it into the dishwasher.

And to keep odors to a minimum in the future, always run your disposal with water before, during, and after grinding food. (Use hot water when grinding foods with fats or oils, and cold for anything else.) We suggest running the water for about 7 seconds after you hear the grinder stop, to help flush away any remaining particles.

How can I keep my wipers from freezing to my windshield?

RUBBER WIPER BLADES tend to freeze to the glass of your windshield when a car is parked outside in the cold. The simplest fix? On many vehicles you can pull the wiper arms up and off the windshield and leave them that way—and it's especially important to do so when snow or freezing temperatures are expected.

When you come back to your car, don't try to turn the wipers on before de-icing; doing so can wear out the blades, or even snap the wipers if they're stuck to the glass. (If you usually leave your wipers on the Auto setting, turn the wipers to Off when you park the car to prevent them from turning on automatically when you start the car later.) And never use hot water to de-ice your windshield: The extreme temperature change can crack the glass. Instead, start your car and turn on the defroster with the fans on high speed to melt the exterior ice before using a plastic scraper. And it's a good idea to inspect your wipers regularly: They should be replaced about every six months.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGE BLOCH

CR Insights

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTO: AWAY

IN THE KNOW

Pack These Bags for Your Next Big Trip

THE BEST FULL-SIZED luggage (we're talking about mid- to large-sized bags that don't fit in a plane's overhead carry-on bin) should be capacious, lightweight, and super-durable—because checked bags can take a real beating as they go from airport conveyer belts and carts to cargo holds.

With countless luggage brands out there, though, where to look for bags that do it all? When we recently surveyed more than 13,000 CR members about their checked suitcases, just a few high-end brands rose to the top, distinguished by their superior durability and wheelability. What also sets these suitcase brands apart from the pack are their generous warranties: All four companies included at right offer lifetime or limited lifetime guarantees. While the recommended brands' bags can be pricey, CR members felt that they were worth the money.

Away (shown at left)
Price range:
$345 to $745
Warranty: Lifetime limited, covering damage to the shell, wheels, handles, zippers, and more. Return it after 100 days if not satisfied.

100 OVERALL SATISFACTION

Away aced every aspect of CR's checked-luggage brand ratings. The company sells hard-shell suitcases with 360-degree spinner wheels and TSA-approved combo locks, such as this 26x18.5-inch Medium Flex suitcase, $395.

Eagle Creek
Price range:
$299 to $489
Warranty: Lifetime guarantee on workmanship and materials.

97 OVERALL SATISFACTION

Eagle Creek sells a small selection of nicely priced checked suitcases, including wheeled duffels, traditional spinner suitcases, and large two-wheeled trunks. Most bags are soft-sided, but one of the brand's lines—Tarmac—features hard-backed luggage.

Rimowa
Price range:
$875 to $2,400
Warranty: Lifetime guarantee for all functional aspects. Exclusions apply.

97 OVERALL SATISFACTION

Luxury brand Rimowa earned top marks for wheelability and durability in our survey-based ratings. The company's suitcases and trunks are all hard-sided—aluminum or polycarbonate—and have Rimowa's signature ribbed surface with integrated combination locks.

Briggs & Riley
Price range:
$379 to $1,049
Warranty: Lifetime guarantee covers the repair of all functional aspects for the life of the bag.

94 OVERALL SATISFACTION

Briggs & Riley earned great scores for ease of packing, wheelability, and durability. The brand offers mostly soft-sided spinner checked luggage with a patented "Outsider" handle, giving you extra packing room because the handle is on the back of the case.

For more brand ratings, Digital and All Access members can go to CR.org/luggage.

CR MONEY SAVER

Should You Buy Now, Pay Later?

"BUY NOW, PAY LATER" services—which are short-term loans for goods—are exploding in popularity. In fact, 28 percent of Americans have paid for clothing, electronics, appliances, or other items this way, according to an August 2022 CR nationally representative survey of 6,539 U.S. adults.

It's easy to see the attraction. Buy now, pay later (BNPL) services typically offer no-interest loans and sometimes charge zero fees, even on late payments. And shoppers find that getting approved for a loan can be fast and easy, without the kind of "hard" check on their credit report that could lower their credit score. That means you could buy something pricey—a big-screen TV or a couch—in installments without any interest or fees.

Still, CR's August survey and other research do raise some red flags. For example, 28 percent of people who have used a BNPL service report having had at least one problem, including difficulty returning products or getting refunds. And complaints about these services to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and Better Business Bureau have also surged recently.

If you're interested in a buy now, pay later offer, follow our experts' advice to steer clear of potential pitfalls.

For more information on buy now, pay later services, go to CR.org/bnpl.

PHOTOS, BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: CONSUMER REPORTS; THE NEW YORK TIMES; CONSUMER REPORTS; CPSC; CONSUMER REPORTS; ARLO

1. ALWAYS OPT FOR AUTOPAY

Eleven percent of people in CR's August survey who used these services missed at least one payment, because, in some cases, they lost track of payment due dates. The result can be late fees or added interest charges, and the missed payment could appear on your credit report. While some services may not charge late fees, including services like Affirm and PayPal Pay in 4, others do: Afterpay, for example, charges up to $8, and Zip charges up to $10.

So take a close look at terms of the agreement to avoid surprises, and always set up autopay to help you avoid confusion over when a payment is due.

2. TRY TO MAKE ONLY ONE BNPL PURCHASE AT A TIME

If you take out a buy now, pay later loan, try not to be paying off more than one or two at a time, says CR's Chuck Bell, who focuses on consumer financial service regulations. CR's August survey found that people juggling four or more BNPL loans at once were twice as likely to have missed a payment. If you decide to make two BNPL purchases in the same time frame, it's wise to stick with a single provider—because multiple vendors are likely to have different payment deadlines and fees, which could become confusing. We also advise looking for a BNPL service that offers purchase protection. PayPal, for example, will reimburse you if certain items don't arrive or are different than described.

CR Time Traveler HOME SAFETY

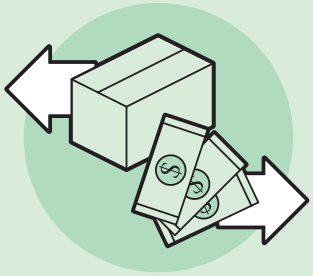
1949 We warn that some table radios are a fire hazard due to exposed metal screws, and advise buying a safer model, like the one above.

1959 CR tests furniture paints and warns that those containing lead may be dangerous on children's furniture because toddlers can ingest the paint and suffer lead poisoning.

1966 The first modern home security system is invented by nurse Marie Van Brittan Brown and husband, Albert Brown, an electronics technician.

1977 We test DIY burglar alarms and find many that cost around $150 work well to deter burglars. But homes with high-value items should get a pro system ($1,000 or more).

1979 CR tries out emergency home ladders, using them to climb down from a bedroom window. Only two of nine brands pass our test.



3. KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON RETURNS

The CFPB says that a common consumer complaint is that if you return an item after making a few of the payments, refunds can take weeks or longer to obtain. It has also received reports of refunds that never arrive. If you do return an item you purchased using one of these services, check with the BNPL company as soon as you've made the return to confirm your refund. If the refund hasn't been credited yet, ask whether you can have an extension on the loan payments that are still due, to help ensure that the refund will be credited to your loan before the next payment due date—and you won't be saddled with a late fee.

4. IF YOU NEED TO MISS A PAYMENT, NEGOTIATE

If you don't make a BNPL payment for any reason (even if you're waiting for a refund on a returned item), your credit score could still take a hit. CR's August survey found that of those people who had at least one late payment, 15 percent revealed it was included on their credit report. And 21 percent said their BNPL debt was turned over to a collection agency. "Both can lower your credit score, sometimes by a lot," Bell says.

Notify the company if you can't pay on time—before the payment is due, if possible. You may be able to get an extension. If that doesn't work, ask for a "hardship repayment arrangement."

PHOTOS, FROM TOP: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS; MAZDA

THE BETTER DEAL

LUXURY SUVs

HIGHER PRICE

$38,605 - $57,805

Lexus NX
$47,765*

77 OVERALL SCORE

BETTER PRICE

$26,700 - $39,650

Mazda CX-5
$38,125**

77 OVERALL SCORE

THE LOWDOWN

The Lexus NX is a pleasant all-around luxury SUV, but the Mazda CX-5 is its equal in functionality. What's more, our testers found the Mazda more engaging to drive, with nimble handling and a comfortable ride. The available uplevel 2.5 Turbo version has lively acceleration, a leather-swathed interior, a Bose stereo, quality knobs, and heated seats, yet it comes in at about $10,000 less than the NX 350 version.

*Price as tested.
**Comparably equipped.

1987 We test radon detectors in a house with high levels, and recommend activated-charcoal radon detectors, which work more quickly than others.

1992 The Consumer Product Safety Commission rolls out a mandatory garage door safety standard to keep children from becoming trapped under the doors.

1994 Our testers use a heavy metal pendulum to simulate kicking in a door to test the strength of 30 door locks. A Kwikset ($30), Baldwin Prestige ($40), and Falcon ($55) hold up best in our tests.

2012 CR says that indoor air quality is a health concern in many homes. We test 25 air purifiers, and the $300 Whirlpool (above) is our top pick.

2023 Arlo smart security cameras top our ratings. Twenty-one percent of surveyed Americans own this type of product, a 2022 Global Consumer survey finds.

Arlo Essential Wireless Security VMC2030-100NAS
$130

74 OVERALL SCORE

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Our Favorite Trader Joe's Snacks

SUPERMARKETS ARE PACKED with tempting snacks, but which will hit the spot when you're hungry? Our editors browsed the aisles of Trader Joe's recently to find the tastiest (and also healthy-ish) bites offered there. Our most-liked finds are all under 200 calories per serving, and some–like the almonds, chips, and puffs–are also low in sodium.

LOW-SODIUM TORTILLA CHIPS

Quinoa and Black Bean Infused Tortilla Chips $3.29/12 oz.

These chips have 3 grams of fiber and just 40 mg of sodium per serving—not a lot compared with traditional tortilla chips, which can have 100 mg per serving. Enjoy 8 chips (140 calories) with your favorite salsa, which should add only 5 to 10 calories per tablespoon.

PUFF PIECES

World's Puffiest White Cheddar Corn Puffs $2.49/7 oz.

Supermarket snack aisles are filled with cheese-flavored snacks, but we like these, not because they claim to be the "world's puffiest" (though they are light and airy) but because they offer good flavor in a generous 53-puff serving size for just 140 calories and 120 mg of sodium.

HIGH-PROTEIN PICK-ME-UP

Thai Lime & Chili Almonds $5.79/12 oz.

Nuts are a smart afternoon snack because they're rich in protein, so you'll feel satisfied longer. Almonds, in particular, are high in fiber, and offer calcium and vitamin E, too. One-quarter cup of these spicy almonds (190 calories) has 8 grams of protein, 3 grams of fiber, and just 20 mg of sodium.

A TASTY TWIST ON PRETZELS

Almond Butter Filled Pretzel Nuggets $4.49/12 oz.

Okay, pretzel nuggets aren't exactly a health food, but these are delicious. "When you bite in, you get a hit of sweet almond butter, and then, as you chew, it mixes salty and sweet, crunchy and smooth," says CR staffer Althea Chang-Cook. Because they're less healthy, stick to just 8 nuggets (140 calories).

DAIRY-FREE DIP

Vegan Tzatziki Dip $4.29/8 oz.

Many tzatzikis are made with cow's milk yogurt, but this one contains vegan cream cheese instead to make it creamy and dairy-free (though it doesn't give you any protein). Enjoy a few tablespoons (4 for 100 calories) with baby carrots—which have carotenoids, antioxidants that are important for eye health.

SWEET & CRUNCHY CRACKERS

Trader Joe's Fig & Olive Crisps $3.99/5.3 oz.

Prefer a sweeter snack? These little crisps, with hints of fig and Kalamata olives, don't even need a dip—our editors ate them right out of the box. Have 11 of these petite crackers for just 90 calories. But be mindful of your sugar intake: They have 4 grams of added sugars per serving.

PHOTO: BEN GOLDSTEIN; PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH

WORSE – BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

SHOWERHEADS WITH GREAT PRESSURE

IF YOU'VE EVER struggled to get clean under a low-flow showerhead, we feel your pain. Per federal standards, all showerheads can't exceed a flow rate of 2.5 gallons per minute–which saves water but sometimes means a less satisfying spray. In our recent tests, however, we found several CR Recommended models that still provide a robust, hot shower–and some conserve even more water than the federal standard. CR staffers assessed the overall feel of the spray, as well as the heat of the water as it falls.

Hopopro High Pressure Fixed Showerhead (5 settings)

Multi-setting $18

(shown at left)

85 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 4/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 5/5 WATER CONSERVATION

American Standard Spectra+ eTouch 4-Function Showerhead

Multi-setting $113

82 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 4/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 5/5 WATER CONSERVATION

Moen Engage Magnetix 6-Function Handheld Showerhead

Multi-setting $73

81 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 5/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 2/5 WATER CONSERVATION

Kohler Forte 1.75

Multi-setting $88

77 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 5/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 4/5 WATER CONSERVATION

Oxygenics PowerWave 6-Spray Handheld Shower

Multi-setting $40

76 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 4/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 5/5 WATER CONSERVATION

Kohler Moxie Showerhead

Single-setting $70

77 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 5/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 5/5 WATER CONSERVATION

Waterpik 6-Spray 4.5 Showerhead

Multi-setting $55

76 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 5/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 5/5 WATER CONSERVATION

Hopopro 6 Functions Handheld Showerhead

Multi-setting $31

74 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 4/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 4/5 WATER CONSERVATION

Delta Faucet 5-Spray In2ition Two-in-One Shower

Multi-setting $115

72 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 4/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 5/5 WATER CONSERVATION

High Sierra Classic Plus Low Flow Showerhead

Single-setting $40

63 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 3/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 5/5 WATER CONSERVATION

SparkPod High Pressure Rain Shower Head

Single-setting $30

60 OVERALL SCORE

- 3/5 SHOWER FEEL
- 3/5 HOT-WATER TEMPERATURE
- 5/5 WATER CONSERVATION

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

For detailed reviews and even more rated models, Digital and All Access members can go to CR.org/showerheads.

SAVVY SHOPPER

Find the Right Pickleball Paddle for You

YOU'VE PROBABLY ALREADY heard that pickleball—best described as a hybrid of tennis, badminton, and pingpong—may be the fastest-growing sport in the U.S. right now, with nearly 5 million players. Whether you're a beginner or have been playing for a while, experts agree that wielding the right paddle can help boost your game. So we purchased popular and widely available beginner-to-intermediate paddles and had seasoned players try them out. Our evaluators are Eric Ho, Ray Xiong, and Jean Xiong, the founders of NYC Pickleball, an online resource and local community of players. Ho is also a certified pickleball instructor.

According to Ho, the shape, size, and feel of a paddle can make a big difference in your comfort and control while on the court. With that in mind, check out our evaluators' top picks, below.

For more paddle info, go to CR.org/pickleball. To find a club near you, go to usapickleball.org, which keeps a national list.

PHOTOS, LEFT TO RIGHT: GETTY IMAGES; PERRY SANTANACHOTE/CONSUMER REPORTS; NIUPIPO; HEAD; ONIX

1. OUR OVERALL FAVORITE

Engage Omega Evolution Extreme X $170

PADDLE DIMENSIONS: 16½x7⅜ inches
CORE THICKNESS: ⅝ inch
GRIP LENGTH: 5 inches
WEIGHT: 7¾ ounces
MATERIALS: Polymer core, carbon fiber surface

Made of carbon fiber, the surface of this paddle has a natural grit to it—a texture that helps you get a good spin on the ball and won't wear off, like with some paddles that have the grit sprayed on. This paddle also vibrated less than others did.

2. BEST FOR BEGINNERS

Niupipo Explorer $40

PADDLE DIMENSIONS: 16x7⅞ inches
CORE THICKNESS: ⅝ inch
GRIP LENGTH: 4½ inches
WEIGHT: 7⅞ ounces
MATERIALS: Polymer core, fiberglass surface with grit texture

The Niupipo has a wide paddle shape, ideal for beginners because there's more surface area to hit the ball with. It also has a more comfortable grip than other similarly shaped paddles we tried. It comes with a zippered neoprene cover.

3. GOOD FOR TENNIS PLAYERS

Head Radical Elite Middleweight Composite $65

PADDLE DIMENSIONS: 16x7⅝ inches
CORE THICKNESS: ⅝ inch
GRIP LENGTH: 5 inches
WEIGHT: 8⅛ ounces
MATERIALS: Polymer core, fiberglass surface

The solid handle on this model got rave reviews. "It's octagonal," says Ho, which is a shape that tennis players generally prefer. "It offers good control and power, so if you also play tennis and like to drive a ball, this is a nice choice."

4. GREAT FOR SMALLER HANDS

Onix Z5 Mod Middleweight Graphite $90

PADDLE DIMENSIONS: 15½x8⅛ inches
CORE THICKNESS: ½ inch
GRIP LENGTH: 4⅜ inches
WEIGHT: 7½ ounces
MATERIALS: Nomex core, graphite surface

The Onix is light and quick, and packs power. Its shorter grip could be just right if you have smaller hands—but it's not for everyone: A too-small grip can lead to tennis elbow. Unsure of your size? Pickleballcentral.com offers an online grip guide.

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

RAM PICKUP TRUCKS >

Chrysler is recalling 1,234,657 2019-2022 Ram 1500, 2500, and 3500 pickup trucks because the tailgate may not latch properly, due to misaligned tailgate strikers, which could result in the tailgate opening while driving. An unintended tailgate opening while driving may result in a loss of unsecured cargo, possibly creating a road hazard and increasing the risk of a crash.
What to do: Dealers will inspect the tailgate and adjust it, if necessary, free of charge. Chrysler will mail notification letters to owners, who can also call customer service at 800-853-1403. NHTSA's campaign number is 22V-904, and Chrysler's own number for this recall is ZB8.

THE LAUNDRESS CLEANING PRODUCTS

The Laundress is recalling about 8 million laundry and household cleaning products because they can contain various bacteria, including Burkholderia cepacia complex, Klebsiella aerogenes, and multiple different species of Pseudomonas. People with weakened immune systems, external medical devices, and underlying lung conditions who are exposed to the bacteria face a risk of serious infection that may require medical treatment. The products were sold on Amazon, thelaundress.com, and other websites, and in stores including

The Container Store, The Laundress, Nordstrom, Target, and other major retailers nationwide, through September 2022 for $8 to $100.
What to do: Stop using the products. For details on how to request a refund, call The Laundress at 800-681-1915 or go to thelaundressrecall.com. You may need to take a photo of the "lot code" on the product. After you've requested your refund, dispose of the product by closing the bottle tightly and placing it in household trash. Do not empty the product prior to disposal.

SCOTCH THERMAL LAMINATORS

3M is recalling about 516,500 Scotch TL1302 thermal laminators because a safety feature can malfunction if the laminator overheats, posing a fire hazard. The laminators were sold at Costco, Staples, Walmart, and other stores nationwide, and online at Amazon, staples.com, and walmart.com from April 2014 through October 2022 for $35 to $90.
What to do: Unplug and stop using the laminator. Call 3M at 800-772-4337 or go to scotchbrand.com for details, disposal instructions, and how to get a full refund.

CUISINART COMPACT BLENDERS

Conair is recalling about 66,000 Cuisinart Compact Blender & Juice Extractor Combos (Model CBJ-450) because the nut holding the blender blade assembly can loosen and detach from the base when in use, posing a laceration hazard if a consumer comes in contact with a loose blade. The blenders were sold at Crate & Barrel and other department, gourmet, and specialty stores nationwide, and online at Amazon, kohls.com, macys.com, and other online retailers from November 2021 through August 2022 for about $80.
What to do: Stop using the blender part of the combo. Call Cuisinart at 877-339-2534 or go to cuisinart.com for details and to get a free replacement blade assembly. The juice extractor may continue to be used.

BATTERY PACKS FOR CORDLESS WINDOW SHADES

Ningbo Dooya Mechanic and Electronic is recalling about 56,000 cordless window shades battery packs because they can overheat and pose a fire hazard. The battery packs were sold at Budget Blinds, The Shade Store, and other window treatment stores, and online at blinds.com from March 2021 through March 2022 for $100 to $400.
What to do: Stop using the battery pack. Call Ningbo Dooya at 888-943-2391 or go to battery-recall.com to obtain a free replacement battery pack. Consumers will be provided with free return shipping boxes for the recalled batteries.

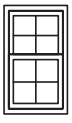
BENTEX CHILDREN'S CLOTHING

Bentex is recalling about 87,000 children's clothing sets because the textile ink painted on them poses a lead poisoning hazard. The sets were sold at Army & Air Force Exchange Service, Burlington, DD's/Ross, T.J.Maxx, and other stores nationwide, and online at Amazon from November 2021 through August 2022 for $5 to $25.
What to do: Stop using the clothing. Call Bentex at 800-451-0285 or go to bentex.com/recall for details on how to return or dispose of the clothing and receive a full refund.

MARCH IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

STRING TRIMMERS

REPLACEMENT WINDOWS



VACUUM CLEANERS

For more info, go to CR.org/buy.

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

The Secrets to Cleaner, Healthier Teeth

Here's what matters when it comes to choosing the right brush (manual or electric?), a hard-working toothpaste, and the best possible brushing technique.

by Catherine Roberts

1 2 3 4 5 6

THE ADVICE FROM dental experts for keeping your teeth clean sounds simple enough: Brush twice a day and floss. But choosing among the many products available to help you do this can be daunting. Electric toothbrush or manual? Soft or hard bristles? String floss or water flosser? And what about mouthwash, dental cleanings, and whitening strips?

The right answers depend partly on your preferences. "Hopefully what you experience with any toothbrush is that you're getting your teeth clean, and then you're going to want to use it again," says Edmond R. Hewlett, DDS, a professor at the UCLA School of Dentistry in Los Angeles and a consumer adviser to the American Dental Association (ADA).

But there are toothcare products with clear advantages. Consumer Reports' tests show, for example, that some electric toothbrushes are better than others at cleaning and are easier to use. Here, we explain which dental hygiene strategies work best, and what to consider when picking products.

Q. Are electric toothbrushes better for your teeth?

A. Most evidence suggests that they are, at least a little. But the real-life significance of that research–which is often funded by companies that make electric toothbrushes–may not mean much for your overall oral health.

A 2014 analysis of previously published studies by Cochrane, an independent panel of experts, found that over several months, powered brushes removed 21 percent more plaque and reduced gum inflammation by 11 percent more compared with manual brushes. Two more recent studies, by scientists who had funding from companies that make toothbrushes, found similar results, including a 2019 study in the journal Clinical Periodontology that followed more than 2,800 people for 11 years.

But that doesn't mean everyone should switch to an electric toothbrush, experts say. It's unclear, for example, what impact an 11 percent reduction in gum inflammation after three months would have on your lifelong oral health or overall risk of gum disease. In fact, even the 2019 study that favored electric brushes didn't find a difference in the number of cavities between electric and manual toothbrush users.

Ultimately, your technique may matter more than whether you use a manual or electric brush. Both types of brushes can be "completely effective in plaque removal" and in helping to prevent gum disease, says Olivia Sheridan, DMD, a professor of clinical restorative dentistry at the University of Pennsylvania.

Still, electric brushes might be better for some people, Sheridan says, because they can be easier to use for those who lack manual dexterity or have braces or permanent retainers, or those who care for someone who needs help brushing their teeth.

Q. What kind of bristles are ideal?

A. Although you'll find manual toothbrushes with bristles ranging from extra-soft to hard, medium- or hard-bristle brushes are best reserved for tasks like cleaning the grout in your kitchen or bathroom tile. For your teeth, dental experts say you should use a soft or extra-soft bristle brush.

That's because harder bristles can injure your delicate gum tissue. They can also potentially damage your teeth, says Clifton Carey, PhD, a professor at the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine, Anschutz Medical Campus.

When gums recede, which can happen naturally as we age, they often leave the less-protected surfaces of your teeth's roots exposed. Those sensitive areas can be damaged if you use harder bristles or brush too vigorously.

PROP STYLIST: MIAKO KATOH

◀ BEST TOOTHBRUSHES

1. ✔ **Oral-B iO 7 Series** $200
2. ✔ **Bruush Electric Toothbrush** $95
3. ✔ **Philips Sonicare ProtectiveClean 6100** $120
4. ✔ **Oral-B Smart Limited** $120
5. ✔ **Brightline 86700** $30
6. ✔ **Philips Sonicare DiamondClean Smart HX9903/01** $200

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN GOLDSTEIN

Q. Are rotating or "sonic" electric toothbrushes better?

A. Both kinds can do a great job of cleaning your teeth. Rotating toothbrushes have a round head that rotates or oscillates. Sonic brushes have a more typical elongated head shape resembling a manual brush, with bristles that move side to side so quickly they produce an audible hum.

Some research suggests that rotating toothbrushes may have a slight edge over sonic types. But again, much of this research could be biased by manufacturer funding. And even if rotating brushes do work slightly better in scientific studies, the differences may not be noticeable to consumers. A 2021 analysis in the The Journal of the American Dental Association designed to assess real-world effectiveness concluded there wasn't enough evidence to pick a winner.

THE RIGHT WAY TO BRUSH YOUR TEETH
BRUSH TWICE A DAY FOR 2 FULL MINUTES. If your brush doesn't have a timer, set one on your phone.
2:00
BRUSH THE FRONT AND BACK OF YOUR TEETH. Be sure to brush the tops (the chewing surfaces), too, says Dawn Smith, chair of the department of dental hygiene at Howard University.
ANGLE THE BRUSH, whether manual or electric, at about 45 degrees at the gumline, which helps you get into crevices to remove plaque.
45°
USE A LIGHT TOUCH. Brush with gentle pressure, says the American Dental Association. Using too much force can damage your teeth and gums over time, leading to sensitivity.
BRUSH IN SMALL CIRCLES. Or use small, gentle strokes back and forth. If you are using an electric toothbrush, don't keep it in one spot for a long time; move it all around your mouth.

ILLUSTRATION BY GUILHERME HENRIQUE

CR's testing concurs: We found models of both types that performed well. Though our top-rated toothbrush is a rotating model, four of our six recommended electric toothbrushes are the sonic type.

If you're not sure which type of electric brush you'll like, check to make sure that you can return it if you decide it's not right for you. Oral-B and Philips Sonicare offer 60- and 90-day money back guarantees, for example.

Q. Which toothpaste should I use?

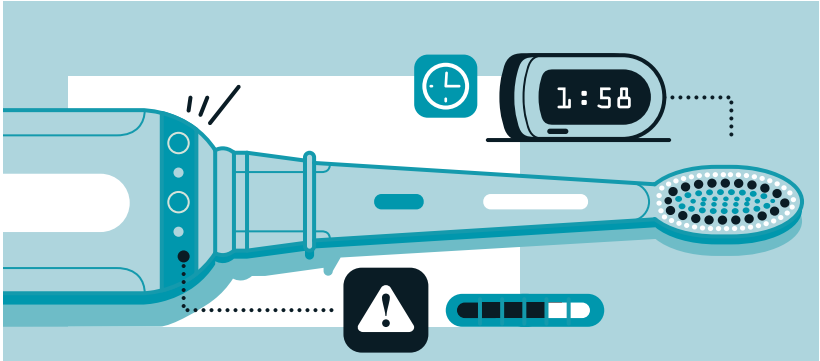
A. Any toothpaste that has fluoride should do the trick. That's the most important ingredient because it prevents cavities and helps you avoid tooth decay by strengthening the enamel. Fluoride is so important that the ADA doesn't provide its Seal of Acceptance to fluoride-free toothpastes.

There are other ingredients in some toothpastes that you may want to stay away from. For example, research has found that people who frequently get canker sores may get fewer ones when they avoid toothpastes that contain sodium lauryl sulfate.

Various toothpaste ingredients fall in and out of fashion. "We have to be very careful of those fads," says Dawn Smith, chair of the department of dental hygiene at Howard University in Washington, D.C. That's because it can take a while for researchers to discern whether a particular ingredient is safe and effective.

One newer trend has little evidence to support it: activated charcoal toothpastes, which are often marketed as whiteners. But some could actually cause damage, according to a 2019 paper from the British Dental Association. Charcoal can be abrasive, which can wear down your enamel, damage your gums, and lead to tooth sensitivity. And many charcoal toothpastes don't contain fluoride.

Older toothpastes designed to whiten teeth, sometimes called "smokers' toothpastes," have sparked similar concerns. But Kenneth Markowitz, DDS, an associate professor at the Rutgers School of Dental Medicine in Newark, N.J., says that most mainstream products on the market today aren't as abrasive as some whitening toothpastes once were. Of course, that means modern whitening toothpastes may provide minimal actual, well, whitening.



ELECTRIC TOOTHBRUSH FEATURES TO LOOK FOR

Cleaning ability is key, and it's the most significant factor in CR's electric toothbrush scores. In our tests, we ask volunteers to skip any dental hygiene for 8 hours and then use one of the electric toothbrushes for 2 minutes. A dental hygienist measures plaque levels in the mouth before and after brushing to rate how well the brush cleans.

Along with strong cleaning ability, you should seek out brushes with features such as a 2-minute timer and a pressure sensor. The American Dental Association says that most people brush their teeth for less than a minute, so a built-in timer can help. Olivia Sheridan, DMD, also recommends looking for brushes that pause when it's time to move from one section of your mouth to the next. A pressure sensor can warn you if you're pressing too hard with your brush, which can damage gums and enamel.

And what about brushes with multiple cleaning "modes"? Edmond R. Hewlett, DDS, says they probably don't make much of a difference in your oral health.

Q. Do I really need to floss?

A. Yes. You may have rejoiced over headlines a few years back that claimed there's not much evidence supporting flossing. And in 2019, even the Cochrane panel characterized the evidence showing that flossing helps reduce gum disease as "low certainty," with inconsistent results.

But don't toss out your dental floss yet. Though the evidence may not be

especially rigorous, regular flossing is supported by basic biology, experts say. The reason you need to brush your teeth twice a day is that very quickly after you finish brushing, bacteria begin to collect on them, UCLA's Hewlett says. If this develops undisturbed, it can cause tooth decay. When you brush, you scrape away bacteria and clear away the food and drink residue they thrive on. But brushing can't reach every bit of a tooth's surface. And that's where flossing comes in.

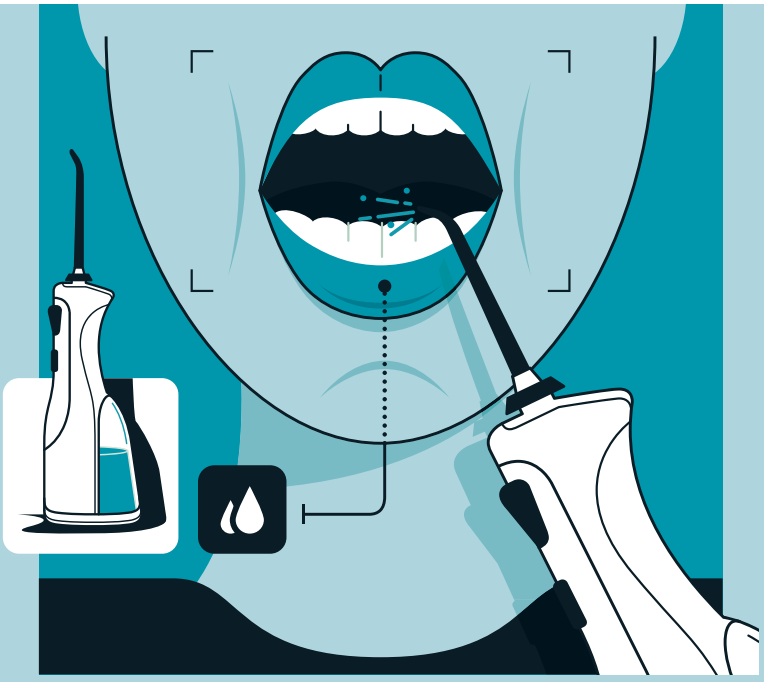
When done correctly, flossing removes bacteria in parts of your mouth that brushing can't get to. Good flossing technique generally involves gently rubbing the floss strand in a C-shape against both sides of each tooth and at the gumline.

Q. Should I use mouthwash?

A. It's fine to use mouthwash, but it's not strictly necessary. While rinsing with a mouthwash can decrease the amount of bacteria in the mouth, it can't take the place of brushing and flossing, Smith says. "A lot of people, they want to skip the big stuff," she says.

Certain types of mouthwash can help with specific conditions. For example, prescription rinses with chlorhexidine, an antimicrobial, can help people who have periodontal disease or are at high risk for tooth decay, Hewlett says.

And if you live in an area where your water isn't fluoridated (or you don't drink tap water), you may want to consider adding a fluoridated mouth rinse to your family's daily dental care routine, Smith suggests. That's especially true if you have kids, and it's something that can be helpful even if there's fluoride in your toothpaste.



IS A WATER FLOSSER BETTER THAN STRING FLOSS?

A water flosser (commonly known by the brand name Waterpik, though other brands make them, too) produces a pulsing, high-pressure jet of water to blast away food debris and plaque from teeth. It's generally touted as an alternative to string floss.

But several experts we spoke with said that while water flossers can help, they probably won't do quite as thorough a job as old-fashioned flossing.

Still, they can be a good option for people who have difficulty flossing well due to dexterity limitations, dental implants, or orthodontia. Some people also find water flossing more enjoyable, and it's a great option if it helps you get into a regular habit.

Q. Are tooth whiteners worth trying?

A. Some of the stains on the outside of your teeth can be removed during a typical dental cleaning. But you might wonder about bleaching your teeth, either at your dentist's office or by using an at-home kit.

The active ingredient in most tooth bleaching products isn't the household bleach you use in laundry but hydrogen peroxide (or a related compound). At-home bleaching, which can involve products like bleaching strips or gels and trays, can be effective, Markowitz says. But it generally takes longer to see results with those treatments than with professional whitening, because in-office treatments are done with higher concentrations of peroxide.

Still, it's best to avoid trying to whiten your teeth quickly—ahead of a big event like a wedding, for example, he says. That's because the higher the concentration of bleaching agents used (whether at home or professionally administered), the more likely you are

Ratings › **Brush-Up Time** Features are a plus, but seek out an electric toothbrush that excels where it matters most: cleaning your teeth.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features								
			Cleaning	Ease of use	Battery performance	Noise	Tested brush head	Tested mode	Timer	Cleaning modes	Pressure sensor	Low-battery indicator	Smartphone app	Rechargeable battery
ELECTRIC TOOTHBRUSHES														
✓ **Oral-B** iO 7 Series	83	$200	⏫	⬆	⏫	⬆	Ultimate Clean	Daily Clean	●	5	●	●	●	●
✓ **Bruush** Electric Toothbrush	79	$95	⏫	●	⏫	●	Default	Daily	●	5				●
✓ **Philips Sonicare** ProtectiveClean 6100	77	$120	⏫	⬆	⬆	●	W2 Optimal White	White High Intensity	●	3	●	●		●
✓ **Oral-B** Smart Limited	76	$120	⏫	⬆	●	●	CrossAction	Deep Clean	●	5	●	●	●	●
✓ **Brightline** 86700	75	$30	⏫	●	⬆	●	Default	Maximum Intensity	●	2				●
✓ **Philips Sonicare** DiamondClean Smart HX9903/01	73	$200	⏫	●	⬆	●	W2 Optimal White	Deep Clean	●	5		●		●
Burst Sonic	64	$70	⬆	⬆	●	⬆	Charcoal Toothbrush Head	Whitening	●	3	●			●
Gleem Rechargeable Toothbrush	63	$50	⬆	●	⬆	⬆	Default	Gleem Clean	●	1				
Philips Sonicare FlexCare Platinum Connected HX9192/02	63	$200	⬆	●	⬆	●	AdaptiveClean	Deep Clean Level 3	●	2	●	●	●	●
Hum by Colgate Smart Electric Toothbrush	62	$70	⬆	●	●	●	Default	Deep Clean	●	1			●	●
Shyn Sonic	62	$55	⬆	●	⬆	●	Whitening	Clean Level 5 (Max Intensity)	●	4	●			●
Quip Starter set (plastic)	60	$25	⬆	●	●	⬆	Standard	Default	●	1				
Pro-Sys VarioSonic	59	$80	●	●	⬆	●	V200M Normal Soft	Level 5	●	5				●
Arm & Hammer Spinbrush Pro+ Extra White Soft	49	$9	●	⬇	●	⬇	Standard Brush	Default		1				

HOW WE TEST: To evaluate **cleaning** performance, we have volunteers skip brushing for 8 hours, then have a dental hygienist measure the amount of plaque before and after 2 minutes of brushing. Testers ask volunteers to evaluate the **ease of use** of each brush. **Battery performance** assesses how long it takes for a brush to charge fully and how long the charge lasts. **Noise** is based on volunteers' perceptions of a brush's loudness. We also look at **features** like the presence of a timer, pressure sensor, and more. Our rating is based on the cleaning mode and brush head that scored the highest.

to experience the main side effects of whitening: gum irritation or tooth sensitivity (which often involves a tingly feeling of pain). High concentrations could even damage teeth. Instead, bleaching is best if done slowly over time, using low concentrations of bleaching agents. Carey, the University of Colorado professor, recommends that people who bleach at home read the product's directions and follow them exactly.

In theory, whitening can last for up to a year, but it depends on your habits: Red wine, tea, coffee, and cigarette smoke are all potent stainers of teeth.

Q. How often do I need teeth cleanings?

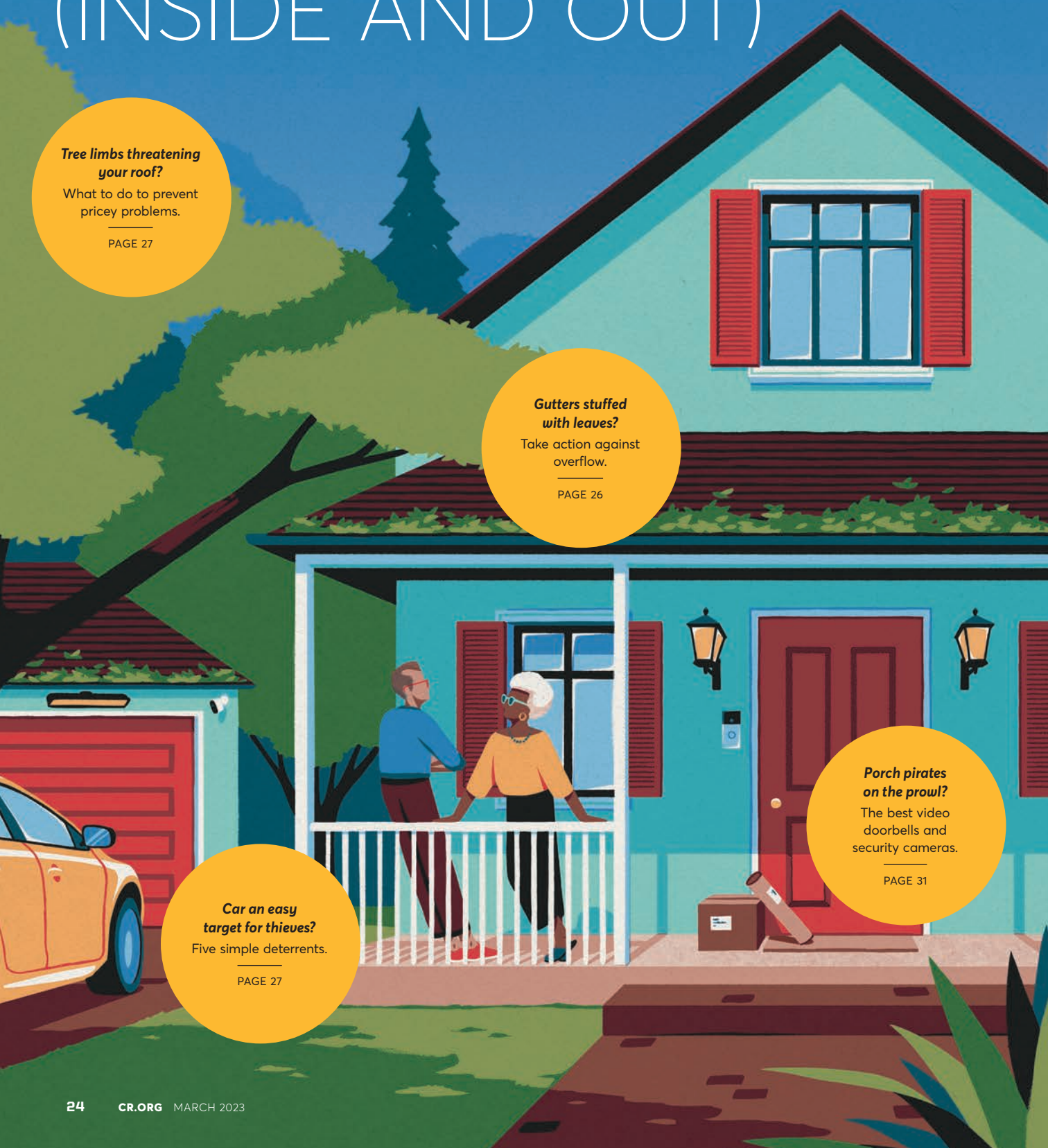
A. You've probably heard you should get cleanings every six months. But a 2020 Cochrane review found that adults who timed their visits based on their risk factors (which you can discuss with your dentist) did no worse than people who followed the six-months' rule.

The American Dental Association says tailoring your visits to your individual health risks is a good one.

If you're not at high risk for cavities–your teeth are otherwise healthy and you don't eat a lot of sweets, for example–seeing a dentist once a year may be sufficient for you, Carey says.

On the other hand, people at higher risk may need to go in more often. If you struggle with a dry mouth, for instance, a common occurrence for people who are taking multiple medications, Carey says you may need to see your dentist more frequently, because saliva is one of the biggest protectors of teeth.

PROTECT Y
(INSIDE AND OUT)



Tree limbs threatening your roof?
What to do to prevent pricey problems.
PAGE 27

Gutters stuffed with leaves?
Take action against overflow.
PAGE 26

Porch pirates on the prowl?
The best video doorbells and security cameras.
PAGE 31

Car an easy target for thieves?
Five simple deterrents.
PAGE 27

OUR HOME

Extreme weather, broken pipes, theft—and more—can all add up to expensive problems. Here are the smart security products and preventive measures that can help you safeguard your biggest asset.
PLUS: *The best and worst homeowners insurance companies, from CR's exclusive survey.*

BY JANET SIROTO ■ ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID DORAN

Worried about fire, leaks, mold?
Smart smoke and CO detectors, thermostats, and leak detectors.

PAGES 28 & 29

Need to secure doors and windows?
CR's top DIY security systems, locks, and more.

PAGE 31

Your home is a lot of things.

It's your sanctuary, it's an expression of your personal style, and, financially speaking, it's likely your biggest investment and asset. So of course you want to keep it structurally safe and its contents well-protected.

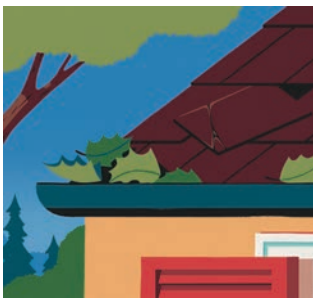
Security, however, may mean managing a number of complex variables these days, from flash floods to wildfires, from break-ins to porch piracy. According to the Insurance Information Institute (III), 6 percent of insured households submitted a claim in 2020, the most recent year studied; property damage, including theft, accounted for 97.7 percent of homeowners insurance claims. The average claim rang in at over $13,000, reflecting the severity of most of these incidents.

Fortunately, there are many ways you can reduce the odds of enduring a loss and having to file a claim. Inside your house and out, using both the latest tech tools and time-honored techniques, you can protect your home and enhance your peace of mind.

"Consumers can be more prepared and resilient, whether by installing a home security system, understanding their area's environmental risks, or updating their insurance policies," says III spokesperson Janet Ruiz. "There is an array of ways to take control." Here, we share the latest thinking on how to do just that.

Protect Your Home From the Outside

RAIN, SNOW, SLEET, HAIL, and heat waves can all take their toll on your home. And sometimes, a critter or even a burglar may attempt a perimeter breach. Fear not: It doesn't take a massive amount of effort or a huge investment to protect your place. With a bit of planning and some smart prep work, you can keep your property in prime condition.



Inspect the Roof

Leaks tend to be a major issue—and fixing damage to the surface of the roof or the rafters can cost a bundle: A new roof costs, on average, $8,994 (more if the roof rafters need replacing).

You could try to spot potential problems with binoculars, but that probably won't tell the full story (and please, no climbing on the roof yourself). "A proper roof inspection involves checking five zones: the home's interior, attic, perimeter, exterior, and the rooftop itself to look for existing and emerging issues," says Paul Watrous, president of the National Roof Certification and Inspection Association (NRCIA). This process identifies where moisture might be seeping in; any cracked, curled, or missing shingles; and issues with flashing around skylights, chimneys, and vents.

Though you may see contractors offering free inspections, Watrous cautions that these can come with a hidden price. "They're doing free work as a potential first step to paid work," he says. "Know what you are getting into and check the company's references." An alternate route: Pay an NRCIA-licensed professional (search by ZIP code at nrcia.org/nrcia-member-directory) to perform an annual inspection. For a 2,500-square-foot house, this is likely to take about an hour and cost around $400; if the roof is in good shape, you can add a roof certification for two years at about $350. While this won't cover damage from hurricanes and other acts of God, if your roof leaks for other reasons, the repair will be free.

Clean Those Gutters

If your gutters are packed with fallen leaves, pine needles, and other debris, water can cascade over the edges and seep inside your home, causing damage. If the wet mess in your gutters freezes during bitterly cold days,

ice dams can damage the gutters and prevent them from routing melting ice and snow.

Getting your gutters thoroughly cleared once or twice a year costs about $160 per cleaning (this is the national average; actual costs can vary depending on your location and the size of your house). Flushing out the downspouts could add $50 to $100. Or you can install a gutter-guard system (between $100 and $2,000 for 200 feet installed, depending on the material you choose; steel mesh is considered top-notch). This offers fire-prevention benefits as well.

Seal Up Possible Leaks

In addition to keeping your roof in good shape, consider having a qualified contractor caulk and brace roof soffit vents to reduce the amount of water blown into your attic during hurricane-force winds and rain.

While you may be tempted to caulk your windows, proceed with caution, says Kurt Clason, remodelers chair of the National Association of Home Builders and owner of Clason Remodeling in Ossipee, N.H. "Except for homes with wood windows, you probably have composite window frames, which need to move and contract as the temperature changes," he says. "You don't want to interfere with that." But Clason does recommend using a bead of caulk to seal thresholds of exterior doors.

Prevent Hail Damage

In 2018 there were 4,611 hailstorms across the country. They can harm outdoor equipment and lead to water damage. If you live in a hail-prone area, use covers to shield essential gear, such as your air conditioner, pool mechanicals, and grill. These covers can be made with solid plates or breathable mesh that doesn't interfere with functioning. They're sometimes referred to as "armor top" covers and can be purchased online for about $40.

Do a Tree and Debris Check

When a heavy tree limb goes flying midstorm, it can wreak havoc on your roof, windows, or car. A trained arborist (look for your state's arborist association for leads) can check trees' location and health and recommend pruning or other action. You'll want to repeat this process every three years or so. The cost of professional tree trimming averages $460 but varies greatly. Tree removal costs about $750 but can run from $200 to $2,000 or higher (if, say, you have a gigantic old tree in a hard-to-reach spot). You may be able to cut small branches safely and effectively yourself with hand pruners or a telescopic pole saw.

It's also important to have at least a 5-foot buffer around your home that's free from yard debris and dead plants. These are a tremendous fire risk, says Ian Giammanco, PhD, lead research meteorologist at the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety.

Shield Chimney Openings

Few people want squirrels, bats, birds, and other wildlife taking up residence inside their home. To keep out unwanted visitors, make sure chimneys are capped; installing a cap typically costs about $300. Look for one that has wire-mesh panels, says the NAHB's Clason. A cap can also reduce the chance of embers drifting out of your chimney and starting a fire.

HOW TO OUTSMART A CAR THIEF

Car thefts are on the rise—up 17 percent between 2019 and 2021, according to the National Insurance Crime Bureau. Take these steps to keep your car safe.

Lock the doors, every time. Unlocked doors are a major contributor to theft.

Park in well-lit locations. If you keep your car outside, a motion-sensitive light nearby can help startle a thief and send them running. A visible security camera can also be a deterrent (see our picks, on page 31).

Beef up security. Steering wheel locks ($20 to $100) and alarm systems with a visible blinking red light ($300 to $700, plus installation) can help discourage thieves.

Don't leave valuables in sight. A handbag, mobile phone, or laptop left on a seat or the vehicle's floor can invite smash-and-grab crimes.

Protect your car's catalytic converter. Located on the underside of many vehicles, it typically contains precious metals such as platinum and is increasingly a target of thieves. A converter-specific alarm (around $30 and up) might be a good investment.

Get a Security System

The latest FBI statistics show an estimated annual loss of $3 billion due to burglaries, with an average loss of $2,661. But a security system can be a deterrent. In University of North Carolina at Charlotte research involving 400-plus convicted burglars, about 60 percent of respondents said they would keep moving if a potential target had one. A security system might also save you 5 to 20 percent on your insurance premium, depending on how sophisticated it is.

The word "sophisticated," in fact, describes how this category is evolving. Artificial intelligence and video analytics help cameras and sensors to better distinguish between, say, your dog chasing a squirrel and a burglar attempting to get in, says Elizabeth Parks, president and chief marketing officer at Parks Associates, a technology research and consulting company. Today's systems can also monitor for smoke and more (see "Your Home Security Toolkit," on page 30).

Do a Perimeter Check

Take a look at your home from the yard and the street as if you were a thief. Are there bushes you could hide behind and then pry your way inside? Can you see valuables? Small moves like cutting back shrubs and closing the curtains can help to secure your property.

Evaluate the Entrances

Exterior doors should be metal or solid wood, at least 1¾ inches thick. Otherwise, they are too easy to bash in. Do you have sliding patio doors? Do they lock well? If not, replace or secure them. Options include adhesive film that makes the glass harder to break and rods to stop thieves from jimmying the doors.

Make sure all window and door locks are working—and use them. Deadbolts with pick-resistant cylinders are best for doors (see our top picks, on page 31); the strike plate should be reinforced, or it could give way with one good kick.

Install Outdoor Lighting

Being bathed in light could send a potential burglar packing. Add motion-sensor bulbs to fixtures near entrances (available at home centers or Amazon, from about $18 for two)—no electrician required.

Protect the Inside of Your Home

WHILE IT'S IMPORTANT to secure your home from the outside, the interior can benefit from a watchful (electronic) eye as well. Indoor monitoring can tell you if there's any risk to loved ones or pets or stop a problem before it starts—and causes pricey damage.

Put Security Cameras in the Right Spots

Suss out the best locations for indoor cameras.

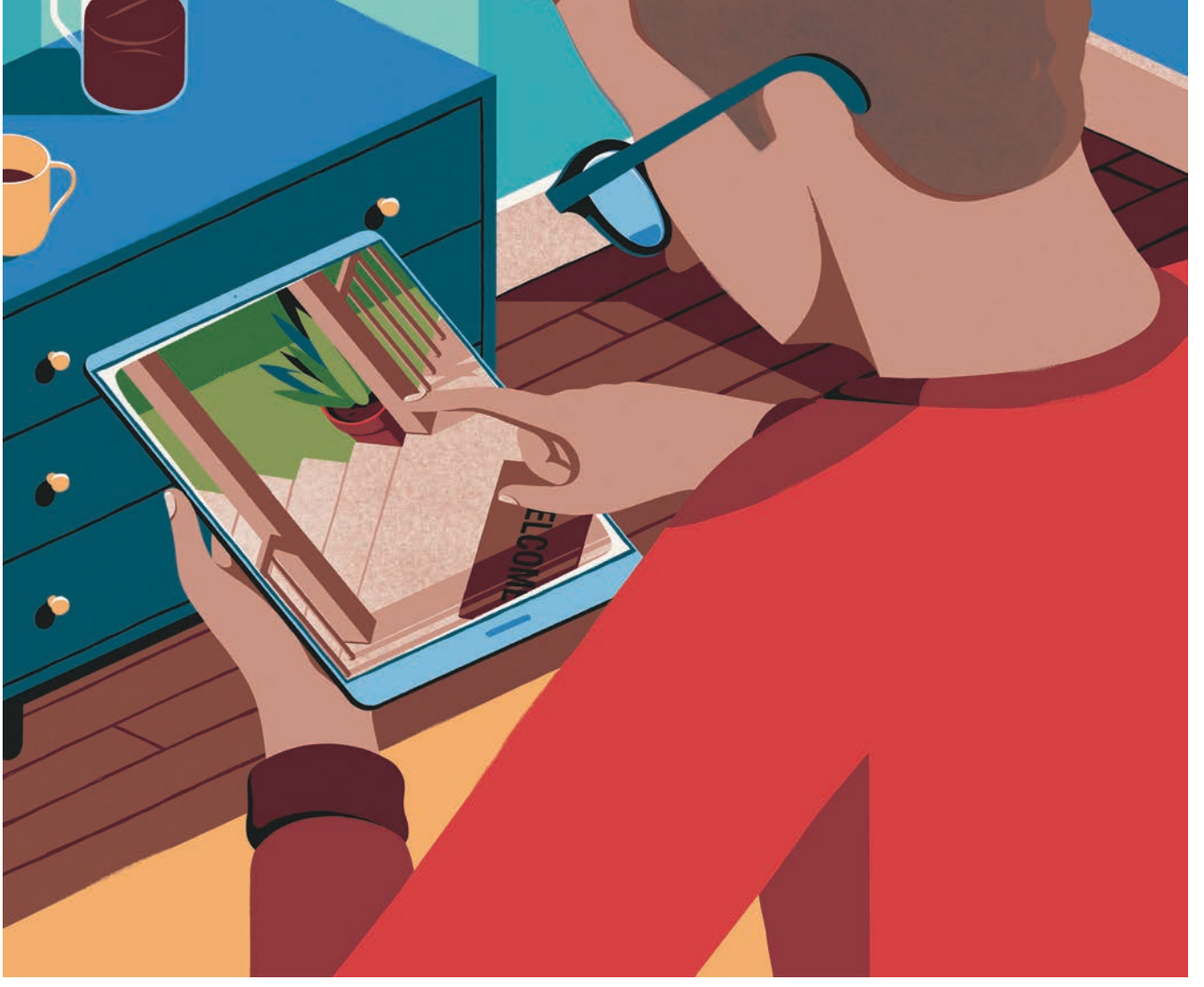
- If intruders are your top concern, you'll want to monitor the area they'll walk through first if they get inside your front or back door (e.g., the hallway or mudroom).
- Add cameras in rooms where your valuables are kept, such as areas where you display collections, have expensive electronics, or keep cash. For privacy reasons, it's best not to install cameras in bedrooms.
- Mounting a camera in a corner usually delivers the widest view; just be careful not to aim it at strong indoor or natural light, which can wash out the video and make it hard to see what's happening.
- Want to keep an eye on pets? Place a camera where they spend most of their time.
- If you have an older person living with you and you worry about falls, you might want to install an indoor camera to monitor your home's staircase.

Watch Over the Indoor Environment

Smart thermostats, such as our two top models, the Google Nest Learning Thermostat, $179, and the Honeywell Home T9 RCHT9510WF Thermostat, $185, connect to a smartphone app, allowing you to remotely control your home's heating and cooling. This is convenient—and can help you avoid disaster during unexpected cold snaps or heat waves while you're away.

A temperature below 32° F is most likely to lead to pipe damage. But you'll need to set your thermostat well above that level (some experts suggest 65° F or above) to make sure that the areas inside your walls where the pipes are—which can be much colder than the interior of your home—stay at a safe temperature.

A smart thermostat can also help you track heat and humidity. The Environmental Protection Agency recommends indoor humidity in the 30 to 50 percent range to avoid mold, mildew, and bacteria growth, or the humid conditions dust mites (a known allergen) thrive in.



Avoid Likely Leaks

"A leak detector is like wearing a seatbelt," says Kirk MacDowell, CEO of security consulting firm MacGuard Security Advisors. "You don't realize its value until you need it." And you may well need it: About 1 in 60 insured homeowners file a water-related claim every year.

These devices either measure the flow rate in pipes on your main water supply or detect water leaking onto the floor. They can be put near your water heater, under sinks, by pipes that run to your washer, and near exterior walls that could freeze. The detectors can be security system add-ons or purchased independently. They can notify you (and possibly a central monitoring station) of leaks, and some can even turn off the water.

CR's testers like the Flo Smart Water Monitor and Shutoff by Moen, $500 to $750, which must be professionally installed, and the DIY Guardian by Elexa Leak Prevention System GVD3, $300 to $406.

Don't Let a Thunderstorm Fry Your Tech

Poof! One good lightning strike, and your valuable computer and TV can sizzle their way out of service. Surge protectors are helpful, but Giammanco recommends putting your most valuable devices on an uninterruptible power supply, which is a bigger version of a power strip that looks like a black box. Prices range from around $50 to hundreds of dollars, depending on the type.

If you live in an area known for frequent lightning storms, such as central Florida, you might want to consider a whole-home surge protector, a device that goes on your breaker box and costs around $500.

Do a Fire-Safety Sweep

In 2021, a home fire was reported every 93 seconds in America, and a home fire injury occurred every 47 minutes. Help protect your home and loved ones by requiring all smoking to take place outside and having smokers douse butts to extinguish them, taking care not to leave a burning candle unattended, and moving combustible materials (such as papers) away from a space heater—and always turn those off when you leave a room or go to bed, the American Red Cross says.

Make sure you have operational smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, such as CR's top-rated First Alert Smart Zcombo-G (1039833) Combination Smoke & Carbon Monoxide Detector, $55, located in or near bedrooms. Change the batteries whenever the clocks spring forward or fall back.

Maintain HVAC Systems

Have your heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems inspected every year. The average cost is $75 to $200, and it can help keep your system operating smoothly and economically. What's more, it can ward off damage, such as a fire from a furnace issue or water damage from your AC's condensate pan overflowing.

Your Home Security Toolkit

KEEPING YOUR HOME SECURE starts with sturdy locks on all entry points. A security system adds another level of protection, alerting you to a breach at any of those entries or to unexpected movement inside the house. A DIY system, such as those from Ring and SimpliSafe, is fairly easy to set up and typically operates via an app on your mobile device, allowing you to monitor it on the go. The equipment in starter kits for these systems varies slightly, but the kits generally include a base station, a keypad, and some combination of door and window sensors, motion sensors, and cameras. Some have a range extender to enhance coverage. (See three top picks, on the facing page.) Most systems also offer optional extras, from panic buttons to glass-break sensors to smoke and carbon monoxide monitors, for about $35 to $40 each. You can also install smart wireless WiFi-enabled video cameras, a video doorbell, a thermostat, smoke and CO detectors, leak detectors, and more that are independent of a security system but still allow remote control.

Cameras
Mount them about 8 to 10 feet up in indoor rooms you want to watch, and near outdoor entry points and your garage or parking area.
Entry Sensors
These two-part sensors notify the system when the contact between the two sides is interrupted, indicating that the door or window has been opened.
Household Sensors
DIY systems offer extra options that can help you catch problems before they cause damage, including flood and freeze sensors, glass-break sensors, and smoke and CO monitors.
Motion Sensors
Most DIY systems come with at least one. Place it on the wall, about 7 feet above the floor, in an entry hall.
Base Station and Keypads
The base station is the hub of the DIY system and requires a strong WiFi signal to work properly. The keypads go near the main doors, where you can use a code to arm or disarm the system as you come and go.

DIY Security Systems

These wireless setups are typically easy to install yourself, without an electrician. They are sold as starter kits, and you can add more components and sensors à la carte. Some offer optional professional monitoring.

Ring Alarm Pro B08HSTJPMS $300 *(shown above)*
79 OVERALL SCORE

SimpliSafe The Essentials SS3-01 $165
76 OVERALL SCORE

Ring Alarm Security Kit 4K19SZ-0EN0 (2nd Gen.) $299
74 OVERALL SCORE

Security Cameras

Wireless security cameras connect to WiFi and can be plugged in for power or run on a rechargeable battery. You monitor them yourself via a smartphone app.

Arlo Essential Wireless Security VMC2030-100NAS $80 *(shown above)*
74 OVERALL SCORE

Ring Stick Up Cam (Battery; 3rd Gen.) $73
70 OVERALL SCORE

Lorex 2K Pan-Tilt WiFi W462AQC-E Wireless Security Camera $60 *(indoor only)*
74 OVERALL SCORE

Video Doorbells

They offer all the features of a wireless security camera while also alerting you if someone rings the doorbell. You probably won't need an additional security camera covering the same door.

SimpliSafe Doorbell Pro SS3 $170 *(shown above)*
76 OVERALL SCORE

Ring Video Doorbell 3 $140
74 OVERALL SCORE

TP-Link Kasa Smart KD110 $73
68 OVERALL SCORE

Door Locks

A high-security drillproof lock is the best option. New smart locks—also available in retrofit versions that add on to an existing lock—offer conveniences such as remote locking.

HIGH-SECURITY

Medeco Maxum 11*603 $190 *(shown above)*
96 OVERALL SCORE

SMART LOCK

Eufy Smart Lock Touch & WiFi T8520J11 $260
85 OVERALL SCORE

RETROFIT SMART LOCK

Bosma Aegis Smart Lock SL0001 $90
98 OVERALL SCORE

DO YOU NEED A PRO-INSTALLED SYSTEM?

The security systems we test are kits that you buy and install yourself with basic tools. But you can also use a company that provides professionally installed systems, such as ADT or Vivint, to design a system for your home and install it. Here's how to decide which type is best.

What's your budget?
A professionally installed system is probably the more expensive option.

"I'd estimate $1 per square foot for an installed system that is monitoring all the doors and windows of your home with sensors," says Kirk MacDowell, CEO of security consulting firm MacGuard Security Advisors. "Video cameras will add to the cost." You're likely to pay between $15 and $30 per month for monitoring. A basic DIY setup will cost much less (see above), but adding components—door and window sensors, cameras—can easily drive that price up significantly.

How big is your home?
If you live in a smaller home with a simple layout, you may be fine with a DIY system. This can be a good solution for renters, too. But if you live in a home with, say, multiple entry points, sliding glass doors, a guest cottage or workshop out back, and other features that make it more challenging to monitor, you might do better with a professionally installed system.

Do you want to monitor your system yourself?
A pro security system will come with required monitoring (for a monthly fee)—so if an alarm goes off, it will alert the company's service, and they'll call emergency personnel. Most DIY systems offer monitoring (and may require it) for a fee each month, but some let you monitor your alerts yourself at no extra charge.

Are You Insured Enough?

IF YOU HAVE an insurance policy, you know you're typically protected if a tree crashes through your roof or a thief makes off with your stuff. But 64 percent of homeowners are underinsured, by an average of 27 percent of their home's value. That can lead to a nasty surprise if you file a claim. Consider these points to assess your coverage. And renters take note, too: Your landlord does not insure your possessions; that responsibility is on you.

How much does your policy actually cover?

Do some research on what it might cost to replace, repair, and rebuild if you endured a loss. Search online for local construction costs to see if you have correctly accounted for your home's total value. Also, check the Coverage A section of your policy, says Insurance Information Institute spokesperson Janet Ruiz, to see whether exterior structures are covered. If a hurricane leveled your toolshed, would you have to pay for repairs out of pocket?

Are you covered for replacement cost or actual value?

Let's say you installed a new washer and dryer 10 years ago for $1,500. If you are insured for replacement cost, you'll get an amount of money deemed appropriate in today's market to buy new, similar units. If you are insured for actual value, depreciation is factored in. So if the units are worth only $300 now, you would receive only $300 for your loss. Replacement value plans are likely to cost more but may be worth it.

What about possessions?

"Many people obtain more valuable items like artwork and jewelry as time passes," Ruiz says. You can get a specific, scheduled policy for each item of value (which often requires individual appraisals), or it may be easier and more cost-effective to get blanket coverage of, say, $50,000, with up to $5,000 per item. Whichever you choose, make a video of your items of value, so you can prove what you had in case of loss.

Do you have flood insurance?

This is usually not part of your homeowners or renters policy. If you have a mortgage on a home in a flood zone, your bank may require flood insurance. If that's not the case, you might want to consider a policy: Climate change is triggering a surge in flood risk across America, with losses projected to increase 26 percent in the next three decades. Just because your area hasn't flooded yet doesn't mean it won't.

Do you have sewer- and water-pipe coverage?

Typically, this coverage for damage from backed-up pipes is not part of a homeowners or renters policy. It's an "add-on" or "endorsement" and may be worthwhile for peace of mind.

What about hail and wind?

This is typically covered by your policy, but check the amount of the deductible: Between 2016 and 2019 wind and hail damage was the leading cause of homeowners insurance losses.

Is there coverage for additional living expenses?

If your home suffered a fire, you might need to move to a rental for a while. Would your policy cover that cost? What about replacing ruined clothes?

What about umbrella policies?

These provide additional coverage if you're sued, say, because someone is injured on your property. You need enough to cover assets that are at risk. Ruiz says that from $2 million to $5 million (and up) in coverage is not uncommon.

Will your insurer pay up if you make a claim?

Know this number: One hundred percent of covered losses get paid to policy limits. So if your home is robbed and you have coverage up to $10,000, that claim will be paid. But if $50,000 worth of goods are stolen, you will still get only $10,000. That's why it's key to know your coverage details and amounts.

Ratings › **Homeowners Insurance** CR members told us about their experiences with 24 insurers, weighing in on everything from how easily claims were paid to monthly premiums to the quality of customer service.

Insurance Group	Reader Survey Results							
	Overall satisfaction	Claims	Premiums	Service	Advice and help	Coverage	Policy review	Policy clarity
USAA	92	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈	⇈
NJM	87	⌃	⇈	⇈	⇈	⌃	⇈	⌃
Amica	85	⇈	⌃	⇈	⇈	⌃	⇈	⌃
Erie	79	⇈	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
The Cincinnati	72	⇈	–	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	–
Auto-Owners	69	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	–
Farm Bureau Property & Casualty	65	⌃	–	⌃	⌃	–	⌃	–
Chubb INA	64	⇈	⌄	⌃	–	⌃	⌃	–
Country Financial Property Casualty	61	⌃	–	–	⌃	–	⌃	–
Auto Club Enterprises	59	–	⌃	⌃	–	–	–	–
State Farm	58	–	–	⌃	–	–	⌃	–
American Family	57	⌃	–	–	–	–	–	–

Insurance Group	Reader Survey Results							
	Overall satisfaction	Claims	Premiums	Service	Advice and help	Coverage	Policy review	Policy clarity
Auto Club	55	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CSAA Insurance	55	⌃	–	–	–	–	–	–
Hanover Insurance Group Property and Casualty	55	⌃	–	–	–	–	–	–
State Auto	53	⌃	–	–	–	–	–	–
Travelers	52	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Farmers	51	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Nationwide	48	⌃	⌄	–	–	–	–	⌄
Hartford	45	⌄	–	–	–	–	–	–
Allstate	45	–	⌄	–	–	–	–	–
Liberty Mutual	44	–	⌄	–	–	–	–	⌄
Tower Hill Group	36	–	⌄	–	⌄	–	–	⌄
Universal Property & Casualty	20	⇊	⇊	⌄	⇊	⌄	⌄	⌄

HOW WE SURVEY: The ratings are based on responses from 59,670 CR members who told us about 65,000 experiences with their homeowners insurance companies. Ratings include respondents' current insurers as well as prior insurers maintained at any time between 2017 and 2021 (for Fall Survey participants) or between 2018 and 2022 (for Spring Survey participants). Results might not be representative of the U.S. population. The **overall satisfaction** score is derived from CR members' ratings of the individual attributes in the ratings table above, and our CR Consumer Experience Score (not shown in the ratings table). Attribute ratings reflect mean scores for each company on scales that range from completely dissatisfied to completely satisfied. These are the seven attributes: **Claims** is a rating of claims settlements. **Premiums** is a rating of prices paid for premiums. **Service** is a rating of non-claims-related customer service. **Advice and help** is a rating of the proactive advice and help that insurers provide their customers regarding their policy choices. **Coverage** is a rating of satisfaction with breadth of coverage. **Policy review** is a rating of the thoroughness insurers provide their customers regarding their policy options. And **policy clarity** is a rating of the clarity of a policy's contract.

3 WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR PREMIUMS

It goes without saying that you want to be adequately insured in case of a home burglary or a fire. But you don't want to overpay, especially in these inflationary times. Here are three tips from the Insurance Information Institute's Janet Ruiz.

Get the right devices. Installing these protective systems can lead to lower premiums, depending on your particular situation and whether you add, say, a smart lock, a burglar alarm, or a fully monitored security system. For example, Allstate offers up to 5 percent savings if you install a Canary security system; Hippo, up to 13 percent if you have a system that includes professional monitoring. Also, some insurance companies now partner with security-system providers, which can make the process of selecting and installing a system simpler. For instance, State Farm and ADT have paired up, as have Selective and SimpliSafe.

Bundle for savings. By getting your home and auto insurance from one provider, your cost may be lower than the price of separate premiums. At Progressive, you could save over 20 percent, on average, by bundling; Nationwide offers savings of up to 20 percent.

Try for discounts. An array of perks may be available, based on your behavior, such as loyalty rewards for sticking with an insurer for years, savings for having a claim-free record, discounts for going paperless, and price breaks for seniors, veterans, and others. Check with your current or prospective insurer to see what is available.

The Best Pasta Sauce on Store Shelves

Can you get a delicious, healthy sauce from a jar? See which ones taste amazing and which ones are duds, according to our tests. ■ BY SALLY WADYKA

It's no wonder jarred pasta sauce is incredibly popular, with multiple shelves in most grocery stores packed with this pantry staple. That's partly because tomato sauce is used in such a wide variety of ways—to top pasta, of course, but also on pizzas and seafood, and in dishes such as lasagna and chicken Parmesan.

And these days, you can find store-bought options to match an assortment of taste preferences—from garlicky to spicy to those that highlight herbs like basil. Many are nearly as flavorful as homemade but without the work involved in chopping, mixing, and simmering for hours.

To help consumers find tasty and healthy options, CR tested 41 store-bought tomato sauces—32 marinaras and 9 tomato basil sauces. (Overall ratings are based 60 percent on nutrition and 40 percent on taste.) We found plenty that are both delicious and good for you, in a range of prices. "Seventeen sauces got top marks for both taste and nutrition, and are recommended," says Amy Keating, RD, a Consumer Reports nutritionist, who led the testing.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN GOLDSTEIN

A Healthy Convenience Food

As a general rule, nutrition experts recommend limiting packaged and processed foods as much as possible. But jarred tomato sauces are a notable exception. Like homemade sauces, they're typically full of healthy ingredients and few that are artificial. "An excellent pasta sauce will rely on a short list of quality, real-food ingredients," says Whitney Linsenmeyer, PhD, RD, an assistant professor of nutrition and dietetics at Saint Louis University. "Tomatoes should be the first ingredient listed–meaning the sauce is mostly made of tomatoes–followed by ingredients that add flavor, such as olive oil, garlic, onions, and spices."

And the cooked tomatoes in these sauces can offer big health benefits. "A serving of marinara–a half-cup–absolutely counts as a vegetable serving," says Linsenmeyer, adding, "Tomatoes are rich in vitamin C, potassium, vitamin K, and folate."

Tomato sauce is also one of the best sources of lycopene, a potent antioxidant that may help reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers. Sauce, in fact, is likely to have far more lycopene than the fresh tomato slices that are in your sandwich, because cooking breaks down a tomato's cellular structure, releasing more of the nutrient.

Fat, Sugars, Salt

The 41 sauces we tested had little or no saturated fat. We found that even the sauce with the highest overall fat content, Fody Easy to Digest Easy to Love Marinara (13 grams per half-cup serving) has just 2 grams of saturated fat. The rest comes from the heart-healthy fats in olive oil.

Some tomato sauces do contain added sugars, but in small amounts. In fact, you have to drop down to No. 24 in our ratings (Bertolli Tomato & Basil) to find a version with added sugars–and that one has just 2 grams (or a half-teaspoon) per serving. For comparison, the American Heart Association advises that women consume no more than 25 grams (6 teaspoons) of added sugars per day and men no more than 36 grams (9 teaspoons).

"Sodium is the main thing you have to be sure to check," Keating says. Fifteen of the sauces–including Ragú Simply Chunky Marinara, Good & Gather (Target) Organic Marinara, and Prego Traditional–contain 460 mg or more per half-cup. That's at least 20 percent of the daily limit of 2,300 mg, Linsenmeyer says. "So if you pick a higher-sodium sauce, you want to be conscious of how much sodium you're eating in other foods."

Our 17 recommended sauces offer both a good balance of flavors and reasonable amounts of sodium. Those toward the top of our ratings have about 300 mg of sodium or less per half-cup serving. Our top two picks–The Silver Palate Low Sodium Marinara (140 grams of sodium per serving) and Victoria Low Sodium Marinara (120 grams)–are low sodium and have no added sugars.

What Makes a Sauce Taste Great?

While individual preferences vary, a few factors can make the difference between a mediocre sauce and a truly delicious one. "A great-tasting sauce will have a bolder, fresher tomato taste, and fresh-tasting, well-balanced seasonings," Keating says. No one ingredient–say, a huge amount of garlic or an overabundance of basil–should overpower the others.

The most flavorful sauces in our

Pick Your Perfect Pasta

YOU'LL WANT TO pair your sauce with a good pasta, notably one with a pleasing texture. We did an informal taste test of three popular brands of spaghetti, using the same amount of cooking water and salt for each and preparing them al dente according to package directions.

Nutritionally, the three pastas were nearly identical. But they did vary in price, with Ronzoni at $2 per pound, Barilla at $2.50 per pound, and De Cecco at $3 per pound. And our testers noted subtle differences in flavor and texture.

Ronzoni Spaghetti No. 8

This pasta had less grain flavor than the other two we tasted. It was also a little less dense. So if you prefer a softer pasta rather than a chewy one, this is a good pick for you.

Barilla Spaghetti Rigati

Barilla's pasta is made from a combination of durum wheat flour and semolina (a coarse grind of durum wheat), making it a good choice for those who like their pasta with a bit more bite.

De Cecco Spaghetti No. 12

These slightly thicker noodles had a noticeable heft compared with the other brands. They're made with only semolina, which may give the pasta its denser, chewier texture.

PROP STYLING, PREVIOUS SPREAD: MIAKO KATOH

tests were made primarily with whole tomatoes. “Whole tomatoes simply taste better and give the sauce a tangy, bright tomato flavor,” Keating says. Brands with tomato purée or tomato paste as the main ingredient tended to score lower for taste. For example, Prego Traditional and Ragú Old World Style Traditional were sweeter, with a less fresh tomato flavor than those made with whole tomatoes. Sauces that contain dried or dehydrated spices and seasonings instead of fresh also ranked lower in our taste ratings. “Dried spices can be harsh or bitter, as they were in Great Value [Walmart] Organic Tomato Basil and Simply Nature [Aldi] Organic Tomato & Basil,” Keating says.

Price Does Matter

The prices of our tested sauces varied widely, from 30 cents to a bit more than $2 per half-cup serving. Generally, we found that the higher the price, the better the sauce. Most of our recommended picks cost between 94 cents and $1.50 per serving, with Hoboken Farms Basil Marinara at $2.02 a serving. (Monte Bene Tomato Basil, at 94 cents a serving, was the lowest-priced recommended sauce.)

It’s possible to spend less and get a decent sauce. Several store brands, including Wellsley Farms (BJ’s) Italian Style Marinara and Private Selection (Kroger) Heirloom Marinara, fared quite well in our taste testing. But they were high in sodium, with 420 and 540 mg per serving, respectively.

Great Value (Walmart) Marinara, at just 30 cents per serving, also got good marks for its smooth texture and blend of flavors (though it does contain 480 mg of sodium per serving). But other lower-priced sauces, such as Hunt’s Traditional and Simply Nature (Aldi) Organic Tomato & Basil, simply weren’t as tasty.

WORSE — BETTER

What's the Sauce for You?

How do you know which pasta sauce will suit your particular palate? Scan this list of top picks for the flavors or type of sauce you prefer.

If you want a sauce that’s most like homemade ...

Rao’s Homemade Marinara
$1.58
PER ½-CUP SERVING

72

This sauce has a fresh, rich taste and a near-perfect blend of tomatoes, garlic, basil, and other flavors. The only reason it’s not in our top 10—it’s ranked 11th—is because of its sodium content (420 mg per serving). Another option with great homemade flavor but less sodium (300 mg per serving) is Hoboken Farms Basil Marinara (Overall Score, 71; price per serving, $2.02).

If you love basil ...

Monte Bene Tomato Basil
94 cents
PER ½-CUP SERVING

72

This thick sauce is 12th overall in our ratings, but it’s one that testers called out for its fresh basil notes. Another option with big basil flavor: Michael’s of Brooklyn Fresh Tomato & Basil (Overall Score, 71; price per serving, $1.51).

If you like a garlicky sauce ...

Lidia’s Marinara
$1.32
PER ½-CUP SERVING

75

A slightly thinner sauce than many of the others we tested, this one brings robust fresh garlic taste and a kick of red pepper. Another option: Cucina Antica Garlic Marinara (Overall Score, 77; price per serving, $1.43) also serves up fresh garlic flavor.

If you’re trying to cut back on sodium ...

The Silver Palate Low Sodium Marinara
$1.07
PER ½-CUP SERVING

81

One of our highest-ranking sauces, this has just 140 mg of sodium per serving and big fresh tomato taste and fresh garlic flavor. Another option is Victoria Low Sodium Marinara (Overall Score, 81; price per serving, $1.43). It has just 120 mg of sodium per serving, making it the lowest-sodium sauce among our recommended picks.

If onion and garlic are tough on your stomach ...

Organico Bello Delicate Recipe Organic Pasta Sauce
$1.38
PER ½-CUP SERVING

80

This somewhat thin, mild-flavored sauce, with a hint of fresh basil and black pepper, is a great choice for those who have difficulty digesting the onion and garlic often added to tomato sauce. Rao’s Homemade Sensitive Marinara (Overall Score, 74; price per serving, $1.58) is also garlic- and onion-free but higher in sodium, at 330 mg per serving vs. 130 mg in the Organico Bello.

Ratings › **Special Sauce** More than half of the sauces we tested received top scores for nutrition, taste, or both. They tended to have less sodium than other sauces.

Product	Overall Score	Ratings		Pricing			Nutrition Information							
		Nutrition score	Sensory score	Price per package	Package size (oz.)	Price per ½-cup serving	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Carbs (g)	Fiber (g)	Added sugars (g)	Protein (g)	Sodium (mg)
PASTA SAUCES														
✓ **The Silver Palate** Low Sodium Marinara	81	⌃⌃	⌃	$6.40	25	$1.07	60	3.5	0.5	6	2	0	1	140
✓ **Victoria** Low Sodium Marinara	81	⌃⌃	⌃	$8.55	24	$1.43	70	4	0.5	6	1	0	1	120
✓ **Organico Bello** Delicate Recipe Organic Pasta Sauce	80	⌃⌃	⌃	$8.30	25	$1.38	45	1.5	0	6	2	0	2	130
✓ **Cucina Antica** Garlic Marinara	77	⌃	⌃	$8.60	25	$1.43	45	1	0	7	2	0	1	230
✓ **Organico Bello** Organic Marinara	75	⌃	⌃	$8.30	25	$1.38	50	1.5	0	7	2	0	2	240
✓ **Lidia's** Marinara	75	⌃	⌃	$7.90	25	$1.32	50	3	0.5	6	2	0	2	310
✓ **Rao's** Homemade Sensitive Marinara	74	⌃	⌃⌃	$7.90	24	$1.58	130	11	1.5	6	1	0	2	330
✓ **Yo Mama's Foods** Original Marinara	73	⌃	⌃	$6.70	25	$1.12	60	4.5	0	5	1	0	1	130
✓ **Wellsley Farms (BJ's)** Italian Style Marinara	73	⌃	⌃⌃	$8.60	32	$1.23	70	4	0.5	6	2	0	2	420
✓ **The Silver Palate** San Marzano Marinara	73	⌃	⌃	$6.10	25	$1.02	60	3.5	0.5	6	2	0	1	380
✓ **Rao's** Homemade Marinara	72	⌃	⌃⌃	$7.90	24	$1.58	100	7	1	6	1	0	2	420
✓ **Monte Bene** Tomato Basil	72	⌃	⌃	$4.70	24	$0.94	60	1.5	0	9	2	0	2	240
✓ **Barilla** Vero Gusto Tomato & Basil	72	⌃	⌃⌃	$6.50	20	$1.44	130	9	1.5	10	3	0	2	430
✓ **Carbone** Marinara	71	⌃	⌃⌃	$8.90	24	$1.48	90	7	1	6	1	0	1	410
✓ **Hoboken Farms** Basil Marinara	71	⌃	⌃	$12.10	25	$2.02	80	6	1	5	0	0	1	300
✓ **Michael's of Brooklyn** Fresh Tomato & Basil	71	⌃	⌃	$10.60	32	$1.51	45	2	0	5	2	0	1	320
✓ **Good & Gather (Target)** Signature Marinara	70	⌃	⌃	$7.40	24.3	$1.23	70	4.5	0.5	6	<1	0	1	350
Victoria White Linen Marinara	70	!	⌃⌃	$9.90	40	$0.99	70	4	0.5	6	2	0	1	470
Victoria Marinara	70	!	⌃⌃	$8.40	24	$1.40	70	4	0.5	6	1	0	1	490
Fody Easy to Digest Easy to Love Marinara	67	!	⌃	$7.70	19.4	$1.71	150	13	2	8	2	0	2	470
Private Selection (Kroger) Heirloom Marinara	66	!	⌃⌃	$3.25	16	$0.93	70	3	0	8	1	0	2	540
Newman's Own Organic Tomato & Basil	66	⌃	!	$3.10	23.5	$0.62	90	4	0.5	11	3	0	3	430
Great Value (Walmart) Marinara	64	!	⌃	$1.50	23	$0.30	60	2	0	9	2	0	2	480
Bertolli Tomato & Basil	64	!	⌃	$3.60	24	$0.72	70	2.5	0	10	1	2	3	350
365 Whole Foods Market Organic Marinara	64	⌃	!	$2.70	25	$0.45	60	2.5	0	8	2	0	2	410
Muir Glen Organic Tomato Basil	63	⌃	!	$3.90	25.5	$0.65	80	4.5	0.5	9	2	0	2	310
Classico Tomato & Basil	63	⌃	!	$3.40	24	$0.68	50	1	0	8	2	0	2	410
Newman's Own Marinara	62	!	⌃	$3.20	24	$0.64	80	2	0	12	3	0	3	490

Product	Overall Score	Ratings		Pricing			Nutrition Information							
		Nutrition score	Sensory score	Price per package	Package size (oz.)	Price per ½-cup serving	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Carbs (g)	Fiber (g)	Added sugars (g)	Protein (g)	Sodium (mg)
PASTA SAUCES *Continued*														
Trader Giotto's (Trader Joe's) Organic Marinara Sauce	58			$2.75	25	$0.46	60	1.5	0.5	10	2	0	2	500
Barilla Marinara	58			$3.60	24	$0.72	50	1	0	10	3	0	2	470
Francesco Rinaldi Original Recipe No Salt Added	58			$2.70	23.5	$0.54	60	1	0	10	3	0	2	40
Ragú Simply Chunky Marinara	56			$2.60	24	$0.52	60	1.5	0	12	3	0	2	490
Ragú Old World Style Traditional	56			$2.60	24	$0.52	70	1	0	14	3	<1	2	460
Good & Gather (Target) Organic Marinara	56			$2.80	24	$0.56	70	2	0	11	3	0	2	480
Great Value (Walmart) Organic Tomato Basil	53			$1.85	24	$0.31	45	1	0	8	2	<1	2	420
Classico Family Favorites Traditional	49			$3.45	24	$0.69	80	2.5	0	13	3	3	2	420
Prego Lower Sodium Traditional	48			$2.95	23.5	$0.59	70	1.5	0	14	3	3	2	360
Francesco Rinaldi Original Recipe	46			$2.70	24	$0.54	60	1	0	12	3	3	2	460
Prego Traditional	46			$3.10	24	$0.62	70	1.5	0	11	3	3	2	480
Simply Nature (Aldi) Organic Tomato & Basil	46			$1.95	23.5	$0.33	45	0	0	9	2	0	2	470
Hunt's Traditional	39			$1.50	24	$0.30	40	0	0	9	1	2	1	550

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** combines the **nutrition score** and **sensory score** (taste and texture). We calculated our nutrition scores based on the ingredients in each sauce and the values from the nutrition facts panel (such as those for sodium, fiber, and added sugars). Our trained sensory panel conducted blind tastings of the sauces, evaluating them for freshness of ingredients and balance of flavors. Organic sauces received extra points.

CR EXTRA

Jazz Up Your Jarred Sauce

WHILE MANY OF the sauces we tested are delicious as is, you can easily add more flavor if you like. "In not much more time than it takes to heat jarred sauce, you can create some really special flavors," says Celine Beitchman, director of nutrition at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City. Here are some of her favorite hacks.

ENHANCE THE TEXTURE

Save a little of the starchy water your pasta was cooked in and mix it into your sauce. The liquid will release its starch molecules and add body and creaminess.

REPURPOSE LEFTOVERS

In a skillet, heat cooked ground meat, pork, or chicken (or fresh or cooked mushrooms or other veggies) in olive oil, then stir it into your sauce.

BOOST FLAVOR WITH WINE

Sauté garlic and onion; add ¼ cup of wine, cook for 2 to 4 minutes, then add to the sauce. Or combine sauce with a cooked-down mixture of vodka, cream, and red-pepper flakes for a spicy vodka version.

SPICE IT UP

Stir fresh herbs such as basil into your sauce as you heat it up. If you only have dried spices, sauté them in olive oil for 30 seconds to enhance their flavor, then add to your sauce.

PHOTOS, FROM LEFT: GETTY IMAGES (3); SHUTTERSTOCK

Testing for Toxins

Ever wonder about harmful chemicals that might lurk in everyday products? These three people—none of them trained scientists—decided to find out. Here's how they did it.

BY LAUREN KIRCHNER ● ILLUSTRATIONS BY KLAWE RZECZY

You've heard of Erin Brockovich, a law clerk without a science degree who exposed the existence of a dangerous contaminant polluting a town's groundwater–a toxic hazard that otherwise might have stayed invisible. She's not the first person to practice "citizen science" to powerful effect, nor will she be the last.

Maybe you've wondered whether that plastic container you're about to zap in the microwave is really safe to use or whether your favorite chipped coffee mug is exposing you to toxic paint. Some particularly enterprising people who've had similar concerns have also wondered–but then took the extra step of testing the chemical makeup of the thing they were concerned about, and then publicized the results.

These citizen testers aren't professional chemists or government regulators, but all of them were able to raise red flags and spark important conversations about the hidden health hazards that can be hiding in our homes and lives.

THE LEAD TESTER

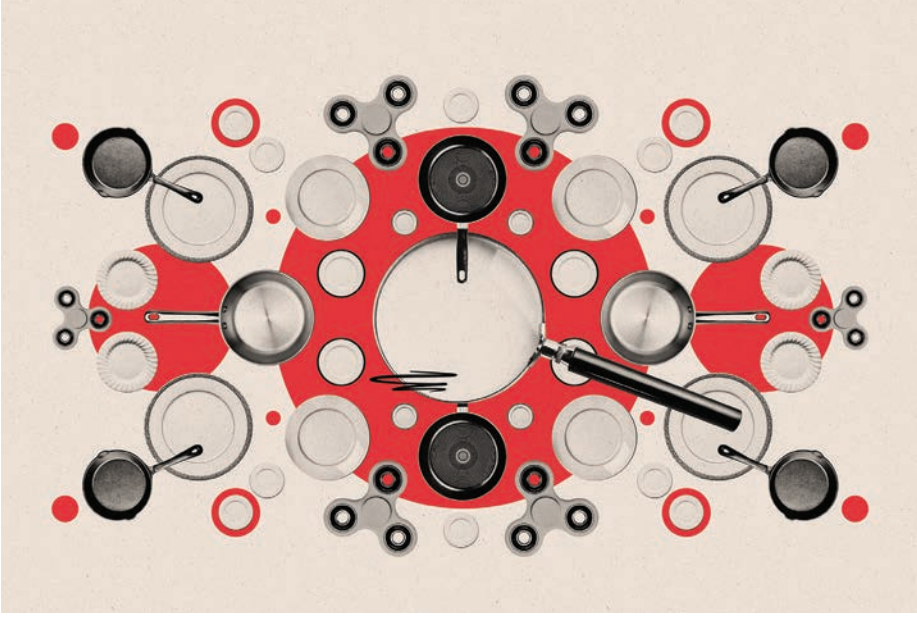
Tamara Rubin takes toxin-testing into her own hands, literally. The Portland, Ore., mother of four is trained and certified to use a professional-grade lead-testing "gun" that can detect the presence of lead in just about any consumer product.

So far, Rubin says she has tested for, and written about, lead in thousands of everyday objects. And she works to raise awareness about the dangers of lead poisoning, a problem that often starts in the home.

Rubin was driven to do this work after her sons–one then 3 years old, the other an infant–became ill, soon after the removal of lead paint in her home. Blood tests later showed that she, and they, had high lead levels, she says. And her children are now battling lasting health impacts, including learning disabilities.

ILLUSTRATIONS, PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

PFAS?
LEAD?



At first just to educate herself, Rubin interviewed lead experts and academics. Then she started posting on Facebook and created a blog, "Lead Safe Mama," to share what she learned. For years she's made herself available to parents who learn that their children have high levels of lead in their blood, and don't know what to do next.

Her experience taught her, she says, that "there's a need to be available to families in crisis."

The year 2009 was a game-changer for her. That's when the manufacturer of a professional X-ray fluorescence (XRF) lead-testing gun loaned her the tool, and she began zapping products in her home. Then in her friends' homes. Then in the homes of her blog readers. She looked at pottery, cookware, crystal, mugs, jewelry, and lots and lots of dishes.

Some of the red flags that Rubin's work has raised have been echoed by later tests from manufacturers or other researchers.

In 2017, for example, after she says she detected lead in popular "fidget spinners," the consumer advocacy group U.S. PIRG also tested fidget spinners and campaigned to stop their sale. And last November, the manufacturer of a stainless steel water bottle for kids recalled thousands of bottles and cups after she reported finding lead in them.

Rubin says that many people mistakenly believe that the problem of lead in consumer products was solved long ago. But, in fact, lead remains a risk for millions of Americans, with the heavy metal found in paint and plumbing of many old homes and buildings, and in some consumer products, too.

Her work's larger goal, she says, is to raise awareness."Once there's a way into people's lives," she says, "getting them to see that lead poisoning could be their problem, then they're more likely to get their kids, and themselves, tested."

THE UNDERWEAR TESTER

When freelancer Jessian Choy, based in San Francisco, took over the "Ms. Green" column for Sierra Club magazine in 2019, one of the first reader questions she chose to answer was which menstrual products were most eco-friendly. In particular, she wanted to know whether period underwear—washable, reusable underwear meant to replace pads—had significant downsides compared with disposable products.

Choy knew that waterproof products often contained PFAS, a group of

PHOTO, PREVIOUS PAGE: DARON JACKSON. PHOTO, THIS PAGE: SAM MURPHY. PHOTO, OPPOSITE PAGE: COURTESY OF LEAH SEGEDIE

How You Can Take Action

DOES IT MAKE sense for everyone to have a lead testing gun at home? No. And is it a lot to expect people to self-fund a lab to test for PFAS? Yes. But there are other ways to get involved if you're concerned about hazardous toxins in your home or community, and if you want the powers that be to pay attention.

1. See whether you can run some tests in your own home. For instance, you can test for lead in paint using kits sold in hardware stores or online. In some cases, you may be able to send a sample of your tap water to your local health department to get tested for lead, for free. You can also have water tested for certain PFAS through companies such as SimpleLab and WaterCheck, though it can cost $100 or more.

2. Do some research. Is a local environmental group working on an issue you are concerned about? Have any local officials spoken about it? Is there an expert nearby who wants help, or an ongoing research project you can join by collecting data or volunteering time? (CitizenScience.gov, a partnership of the U.S. General Services Administration and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, is one place to start.)

chemicals linked to certain cancers and other health problems. She was also aware that companies don't always know exactly what's in their products. So when she contacted six manufacturers of period underwear, she was prepared to be skeptical if they claimed they were totally safe and sustainable. But only one responded to her at all.

So Choy decided to get the products tested herself. She sent samples of two brands to a lab at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana run by Graham Peaslee, PhD, a leading PFAS researcher. Some labs test for only a handful of PFAS, but over 12,000 of the chemicals exist–which is one reason why Peaslee measures fluorine, an indicator for PFAS overall.

The results were "startling," Peaslee says. While fluorine was not detected in one product, in the other the levels were surprisingly high, he says.

When Choy wrote about it in her column, she says her readers were shocked. "People were really concerned, because, you know, where do you wear underwear, but one of the most sensitive parts of your body?"

And because fluorine levels were not detected in one of the tested brands, Choy felt it was okay to recommend it to her readers.

THE PFAS HUNTER

One reader of the "Ms. Green" column happened to be Leah Segedie, who lives near Los Angeles and writes "Mamavation," a blog about how to avoid toxins in the home. Segedie says she was a "Nancy Drew" type as a child–curious and relentless–and grew concerned about environmental toxins after several family members died of cancer.

Knowing that PFAS is in many products, Segedie followed up where Choy left off. She has now sent more than 450 products in multiple categories to a lab for testing, including cooking oil, dental floss, tomato sauce, ketchup, parchment paper, yoga pants, sports bras, bamboo flooring, and toothpaste. She laughs when she imagines lab assistants receiving yet another pallet of toilet paper from her.

The testing isn't cheap: She has spent about $75,000 on the work so far, though she has offset that cost with reader donations and sponsorship from the nonprofit publication Environmental Health News. "But," she says, "to be honest, I'm such a pain in the butt that I would do this regardless."

Segedie says many of her readers are mothers, who are often the decision-makers of the household. "These women who need to care for and feed their families, they don't have the information they need," Segedie says. "No one was answering my questions quick enough," she says, "so I just had to go and figure it out. And God bless these [labs] that can handle me."

Segedie is quick to admit that she doesn't have a scientific background–but she has a lot of experts helping her translate lab results into plain English and vetting her write-ups. One is Terrence Collins, PhD, a professor of chemistry at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh and the director of the Institute for Green Science.

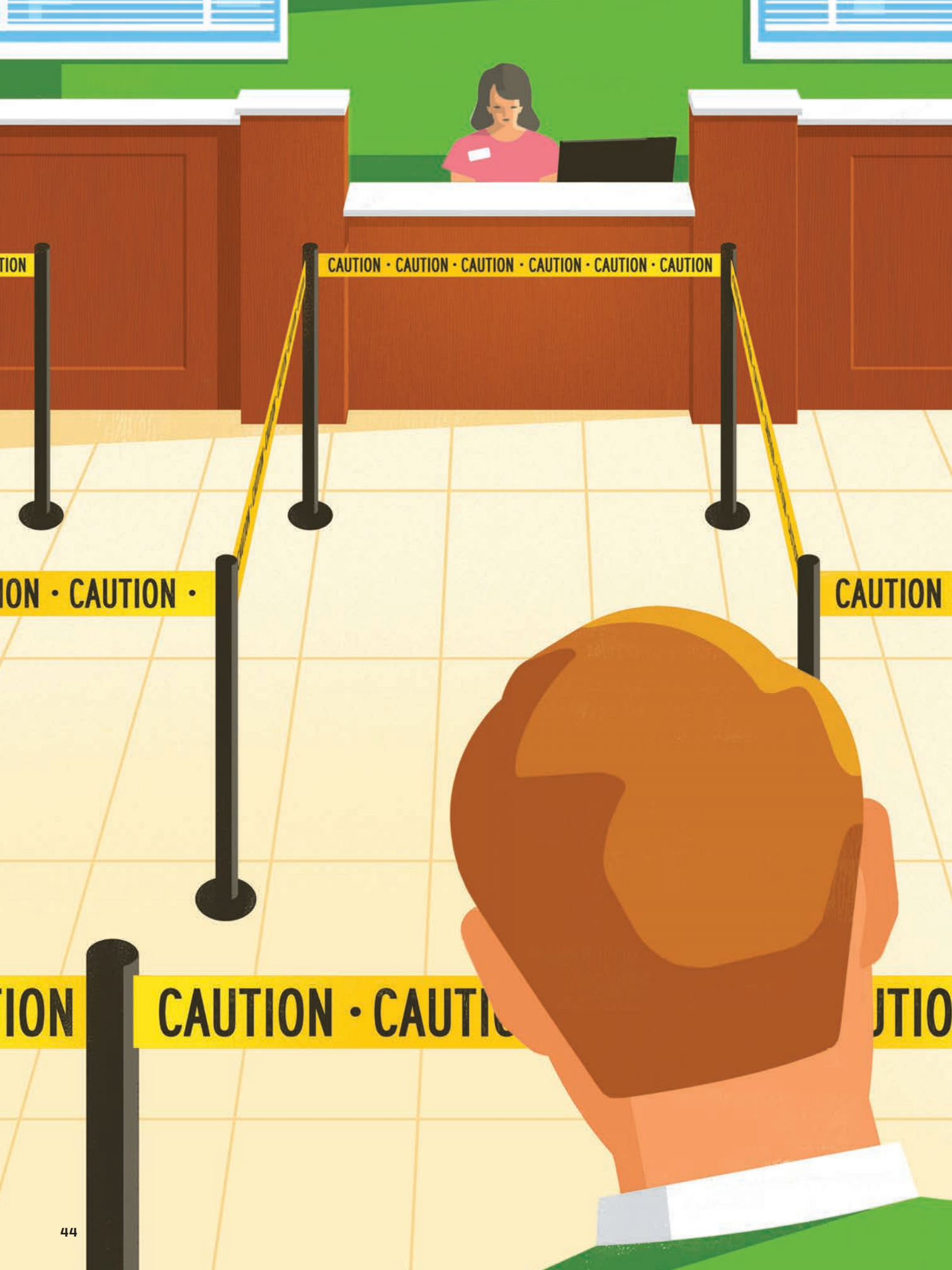
"Leah and her work are important, even critical, elements of addressing the massive unsustainability" of how many everyday products are made, Collins says. He also has thoughts about critics of people like Segedie who decide to take testing into their own hands. There's so much work to be done to combat toxic contaminants that the more people who get involved, the better, he says. "People say, 'Oh, you can't do that, you're not a scientist.'" But, he says, "That's nonsense."

3. Be a change agent. Talk to your neighbors about your concerns. Attend community board or town council meetings to raise those issues. Find out who represents you in local government, and tell them what matters to you, why, and what you think should be done to address the problem.

As these three citizen testers' stories demonstrate, a little curiosity and persistence can go a long way.

A CR Tradition

Consumer Reports has a long history of asking citizen volunteers for help with our research. In 1959, we asked readers to send us milk from local groceries to track evidence of radiation from nuclear testing. More recently, we had readers bottle up samples of their tap water to measure PFAS contamination. To see how you can participate in current CR projects, go to **CR.org/communityreports**.


CAUTION · CAUTION · CAUTION · CAUTION · CAUTION · CAUTION
CAUTION

CHOOSE THE RIGHT BANK FOR YOU

Tired of high fees, low yields on savings, and poor customer service? There are more ways than ever to get what you need.

by Scott Medintz **Illustrations by Chris Gash**

CONSUMER BANKING is changing, fast.

As you may have noticed, many walk-in banks are no longer providing the level of customer service they used to, as they close branches, cut staff, and ask customers to use technology to handle basic banking needs.

Meanwhile, online-only banks (which have no branches at all) and so-called neobanks (tech companies that offer bank-like services online even though they often are not chartered banks) have proliferated, ushering in some promising innovations and pushing the old guard to evolve. But some of these innovators have drawbacks of their own, such as limited resources for customer service should something go wrong, consumer advocates say. Hundreds of customers of one neobank, Chime, for example, recently complained to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau that the company was slow to resolve their problems after they lost access to their funds.

The upshot? More reasons than ever to question whether you're banking at the right place, and growing odds that if you're dissatisfied with your current bank, there's a financial company that can better serve your needs.

What follows are five common banking complaints, and tips on how to find a bank that's better for you. Keep in mind that it might make sense to bank at more than one place—by choosing one institution for your basic banking and bill-paying, for example, and another for maxing out the interest on your savings. And make sure to think about your future needs: Some valuable banking services—small-dollar loans that can be quickly approved online, for example—are often available only to preexisting customers. And fees that might not affect you now could prove costly if, say, your household budget tightens.

COMPLAINT

1 You're unhappy with customer service

Some of us may recall the days of "relationship banking" and familiar faces at the teller window. But that experience is fading into the past—for all except clients whose large deposits can buy them access to concierge-type services like dedicated tellers. The rest of us are expected, even by walk-in banks, to handle many of our banking chores ourselves.

But experts say ordinary customers can still find solid service if they focus on the types of service they want and need—and are willing to use different institutions to satisfy them.

Conveniently located walk-in branches are obviously crucial, for example, if you're looking for traditional in-person banking services, such as the ability to get certified checks or make large cash withdrawals. And if something goes wrong, it can be efficient to straighten out the problem face to face.

But an institution that maintains normal working hours may not be right for you if that doesn't suit your schedule, says Matthew Goldberg, banking analyst for Bankrate. So seek out one of a number of banks that now offer evening and weekend hours at some locations, including behemoths TD Bank (until 7 p.m. on some weekdays, and several hours on weekends at some branches) and Capital One (Saturdays at some branches).

If you want to reach a human by phone, numerous banks, including several online-only institutions, have agents available by phone 24/7.

Highly personalized service is harder to come by, of course, but you may be more likely to get it at a small community bank, regional bank, or credit union, say banking experts we spoke with. Those institutions are more vested in their communities, so you may be able to develop personal relationships with staff members, and even get a direct phone number to call if you have a question or concern.

But none of this is a given even with smaller banks. If that's the kind of service you want, ask friends, family, and neighbors about their experience with particular local institutions, and meet with a few local branch managers to ask about the accessibility of their staff.

Lauren Saunders, a consumer protection law expert at the National Consumer Law Center, says that smaller community banks and credit unions are less likely than national institutions to offer robust websites and apps, as well as a broad assortment of financial products. Those, too, are a kind of customer service, so build those factors into your decision.

COMPLAINT

2 You're getting next-to-no interest on savings

According to a survey by Bankrate, the average interest rate on savings accounts was around 0.2 percent in mid-December—nearly zero. But Bankrate and NerdWallet list nearly a dozen banks paying 3 percent or better, and several pushing 4 percent. Some of the neobanks go even higher.

It makes sense that high-yield savings accounts are being offered by banks that don't have to cover the overhead of

walk-in branches. But these days a broad range of banks and credit unions are using higher rates to attract depositors, and that includes institutions that maintain physical branches. Capital One, for example, was paying 3.3 percent in mid-December.

The details matter when you choose a savings account based on yield. Watch for monthly fees or rates that apply only under conditions, such as maintaining a deposit of a certain size.

COMPLAINT 3

Your ATM fees are really adding up

The average cost of an out-of-network ATM withdrawal is now $4.66, according to a 2022 study by Bankrate. Those fees can add up.

But there are several ways to avoid them. The easiest is to choose a bank with a lot of in-network ATMs near you, and avoid drawing cash anywhere else. But that may not be a solution if you travel a lot or live in a community without in-person banking facilities.

Another is to choose a bank that's part of a large ATM network such as Allpoint, MoneyPass, Pulse, or STAR. Those networks are mainly used by online and community banks and credit unions that don't have large ATM networks of their own, says Chanelle Bessette, banking spokesperson for NerdWallet. Many credit unions, for example, are part of the Co-Op network of more than 30,000 no-fee ATMs, located in credit unions and at many retail locations. To figure out which networks would be best for you, use the ATM locator tools they all have online to search by ZIP code.

Finally, a number of banks reimburse customers for out-of-network ATM fees. Some cap the monthly amount they'll cover, while others will reimburse ATM fees only if you maintain a set minimum deposit amount. Because they generally don't maintain their own ATMs, online banks tend to offer reimbursements, with caps.

COMPLAINT 4

You're paying overdraft fees

You can avoid certain overdraft fees by opting out of all overdraft programs, in which case your bank will simply decline a merchant or ATM transaction if your account is short the funds. But that can expose you to insufficient fund (or NSF) fees. Between the two, U.S. banks brought in almost $15.5 billion in 2019, according to estimates in a 2021 Consumer Financial Protection Bureau study.

Several forces, however, are working to rein in such fees. One is competition from online banks and neobanks, many of which promise to never charge these fees. Another is pressure from regulators, who have been targeting "surprise" and "junk" fees. As a result, several large national banks have lowered or even eliminated certain fees.

Again, the details matter. Some banks eliminated NSF fees but not overdraft fees. Others decreased overdraft fees or limited the number of overdraft fees they'll charge per day. Still others added buffers, such as grace periods or "cushion" overdraft amounts below which they won't charge a fee. And a few, including Citi and Capital One, have eliminated these fees altogether.

In addition, a program called Bank On (joinbankon.org), part of the nonprofit Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund, has certified certain types of accounts at more than 300 banks and credit unions across the country that abide by its standards, which include zero overdraft and NSF fees.

HOW TO SHOP AROUND

ONCE YOU'VE DECIDED to look for a new or additional bank, you'll have to do some work to find the institution that best fits your needs. Here's how.

- **Pay a visit to a walk-in bank you may be considering.** This is important if in-person banking is important to you. You want to confirm that the hours are convenient and the staffing is adequate, and that the branch offers the services you desire, such as having a notary on hand.

- **For the best savings rates, shop around online.** To save time and find a lot of information in one place, websites like Bankrate and NerdWallet do an admirable job of compiling and keeping up with the ever-changing rates and terms associated with various bank accounts. But be warned that these for-profit sites (and others like them) are riddled with financial ads, and it can be hard to distinguish the ads from the data that the sites have compiled.

- **Find out about fees, whether you do your research online or in-person at local bank branches.** A supposedly "free" checking account, with no monthly fee, isn't a bargain if it hits you with huge fees when you overdraw by a few dollars, and a high-interest savings account won't do you any good if getting that rate requires that you maintain a larger balance than you ordinarily have in reserve or spend a boatload each month on a credit card.

COMPLAINT

5 You need a small loan and your bank isn't helping

Banks have not historically offered customers short-term, small-dollar loans, which is one reason so many Americans looking to fill small budget shortfalls turn to payday and other lenders that charge sky-high rates and often trap borrowers in cycles of debt.

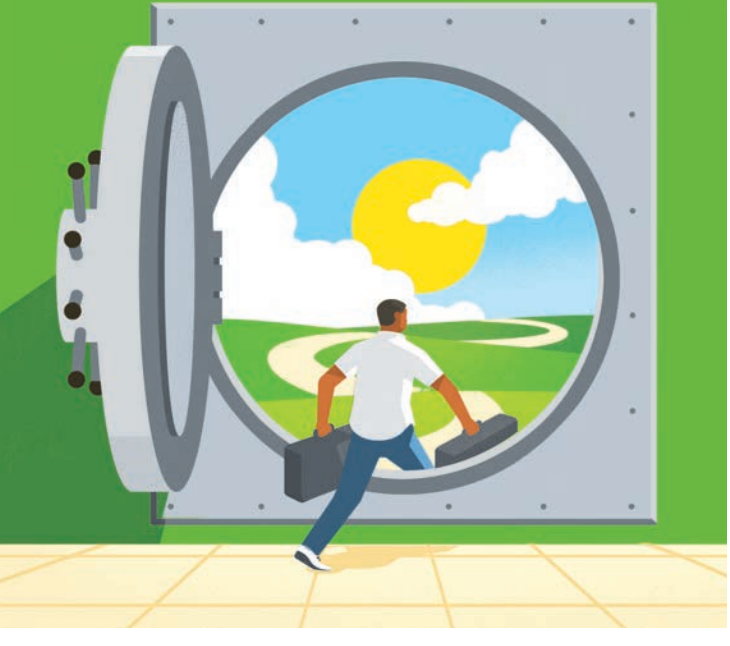
Since about 2010, credit unions have been an exception, with many of them offering payday alternative loans (or PALs) ranging from $200 to $1,000 and interest rates maxing out at 28 percent. (The typical rate on payday loans is about 400 percent.)

In the past few years, however, six big U.S. banks have begun offering customers nearly instant small-dollar loans without running credit checks. Bank of America, Huntington Bank, Regions Bank, Truist, U.S. Bank, and Wells Fargo will give existing checking account holders loans of up to $500 or $1,000, depending on the bank, to be paid back in three to four monthly installments. To qualify, you may need to have been a customer for at least several months. Most charge modest flat fees of between $5 and $25. "For a lot of Americans, this is going to be the least expensive way to borrow $500," says Alex Horowitz, a consumer finance researcher at The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Even for consumers with access to lower-cost credit, like home-equity lines of credit or low-interest credit cards, the fact that these loans cost relatively little and can land in your account within minutes of filling out a short online application makes them appealing.

Breaking Up With Your Bank

If you decide that you want to switch, here are the steps to take.



- **Open the new account before closing the existing one.** For many banks, including some with physical branches, this can be a relatively fast online process. You may need to make an initial deposit to avoid monthly or other fees.

- **Send funds to your new account.** To do this you could use your old bank's online or mobile-banking bill payment service, or the Zelle money transfer service. Or write a check from the old account to deposit into the new one.

- **Contact your employer or Social Security.** Ask them to move any direct deposits to the new institution. (Reach the Social Security Administration at 800-772-1213 or at ssa.gov/myaccount.) Direct deposit may also make you eligible for free checking.

- **Stop automatic bill payments from the old account.** This can be easily done via the old bank's website if you've been using its online bill payment feature for sending out so-called push payments. If you have authorized a company or utility provider to "pull" payments from your account, you'll need to contact the company and follow its procedures for stopping payment. (We recommend that you avoid the pull method in the future so that you have more control over your account.)

- **Keep the old account open until all checks and payments have cleared.** That will keep you from getting hit with any fees.

- **Set up automatic bill paying on the new account.** Also set up other account features you use, such as alerts or automatic money transfers.

- **Finally, close the old account.** Zero out any remaining balance by having the old bank electronically transfer the funds to your new account or by obtaining a cashier's check or cash. There should be no fee to close accounts you have had for more than a few months.

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

SNEAK PEEK

The New Toyota Prius

For 2023, the Toyota Prius hybrid and the Prius Prime plug-in hybrid have gone through a dramatic redesign. A new streamlined shape makes the car sleeker and more aerodynamic, and an upgraded electric drive paired with a stronger gas engine gives it more power and even better gas mileage. Toyota says the new Prius will get up to 57 mpg—more than its already astounding 52 mpg—and acceleration is expected to be much quicker. All-wheel drive is again optional, and standard blind spot warning and rear cross traffic warning join a robust suite of active safety features.

TIP FROM THE TEST TRACK

Check Your Tires Before Driving in the Cold

While it's always smart to check your tires regularly for pressure and wear, this practice is **extra important in the winter.** Every 10 degree drop in air temperature can result in a 1 to 2 psi decrease of pressure—and decreases of just a few psi **can have an impact on tire longevity and safety.** Be sure to measure your car's tire pressure with a reliable gauge before driving, when the tires are truly cold. **Don't rely on your car's tire pressure monitoring system**, because some fail to trigger a warning even if pressure is down by as much as 5 psi.

YOUR MONEY'S WORTH

Is Now the Time to Shop for a Used Car?

After used-car prices soared into the stratosphere last year, costs have started to come back down to earth. According to auto data analyst Cox Automotive, the average used-vehicle price slipped to about $27,000 in November, down about 2 percent compared with last year. Used-car inventory, which had shriveled, has also reached pre-pandemic levels. Although we're still not in the territory where there are great deals to be had, the price drop offers some hope to used-car shoppers who can no longer wait to buy a vehicle. But those who are paying with cash will benefit most. If you have to finance, rising interest rates may negate the lower prices.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

88%

The percentage of 2023 new cars that come with automatic emergency braking (AEB) with pedestrian detection as standard equipment. That's up from 38 percent in 2019. CR has been part of initiatives to push carmakers to include such key safety systems and has called on them to commit to making AEB standard.

Source: Based on a CR analysis of 308 mainstream and luxury car models.

RECALL

Ford Trucks

More than 450,000 Ford F-150 pickup trucks from the 2021 and 2022 model years have been recalled because their windshield wipers may stop working, a clear danger in rain or snow. This is an expansion of a recall of more than 157,000 F-150 pickup trucks from the 2021 model year.

WHAT TO DO: Ford dealerships will replace the wiper's faulty motor free of charge. Owners can call Ford at 866-436-7332.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

The Cars People Love Most

Sports cars, electric vehicles, and hybrids top our list of the most satisfying vehicles, while some luxury models bring up the rear in CR's latest owner satisfaction survey.

by Jonathan Linkov

THE MODELS MAY have changed, but some long-standing trends stayed the same in CR's 2022 owner satisfaction survey. As in prior years, reliable workaday vehicles aren't as prized as automotive peacocks that promise luxury, fuel and energy efficiency (gas or electric), or pulse-quickening performance—and actually deliver. Case in point: Our latest survey once again finds that entry-level luxury cars and SUVs are among the least satisfying vehicles to own because they fail to deliver on the luxury promise.

How do we define owner satisfaction? It's measured by the answer to this key question: Given the opportunity, would you buy or lease this vehicle again? (Our detailed methodology is described on page 54.) This year we received responses from owners of more than 300,000 cars, SUVs, trucks, and vans.

Our findings on the brands and models that offer the highest and lowest owner satisfaction can help you make a successful match with a new car. Read on for trends that surfaced in the survey, along with the brands and models that most satisfy CR members ... and the ones that disappoint.

Stand Out—and Deliver

For the second year in a row, the Chevrolet Corvette is the most satisfying vehicle in our survey. It's unabashedly a high-performance sports car that, with its 2020 redesign, could be mistaken for a Ferrari or Lamborghini. Joining it at the top of the list are the iconic Porsche 911 and brawny Dodge Challenger, a modern take on the 1970s muscle car. People buy these cars for their performance and looks, and their high satisfaction scores prove they give their owners just what they want.

But big power isn't a requirement for admittance to the most satisfying car club. The Subaru BRZ and Toyota GR86 sports car twins and the Mazda MX-5 Miata roadster also make the list of the most satisfying cars, even though

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MADISON KETCHAM

MOST SATISFYING

- 94 Chevrolet Corvette
- 90 Porsche 911
- 88 Kia Telluride
- 88 Rivian R1T
- 88 Ford Maverick Hybrid
- 88 Hyundai Ioniq 5
- 88 Polestar 2
- 88 Subaru BRZ
- 88 Toyota GR86
- 87 Toyota RAV4 Prime
- 86 Mazda MX-5 Miata
- 86 Dodge Challenger

LEAST SATISFYING

- 51 Kia Forte
- 51 Nissan Altima
- 49 Nissan Kicks
- 48 Volkswagen Taos
- 48 Kia Seltos
- 46 Jeep Compass
- 45 Mercedes-Benz GLA
- 40 Infiniti QX50
- 39 Mercedes-Benz GLB
- 38 Volkswagen Atlas Cross Sport

they produce one-half to one-third less horsepower than the Corvette, 911, and Challenger. They prove there's more to a fun sports car than just lots of power.

Energy- and fuel-efficient vehicles have always dominated CR's most satisfying lists, and this year three electric vehicles are among the top scorers. The new Rivian R1T pickup truck and Hyundai Ioniq 5 compact SUV tied with another EV, the Polestar 2 hatchback, with 88 percent of owners saying they'd buy them again. All three also stand out with unique styling, while the Rivian has the distinction of being the first electric pickup truck to come to market.

The Hybrid Edge

Hybrid and plug-in hybrid models in general earn high satisfaction scores. "In this survey nearly every hybrid model outscored its conventional cousin," says Jake Fisher, senior director of auto testing at CR. "We've found that not only do hybrids often save buyers money with fuel economy that's superior to the conventional versions, they also can deliver an even better driving experience."

For example, 87 percent of Toyota RAV4 Prime plug-in hybrid owners said they'd buy their car again, placing it on our most satisfying list for the second straight year. Its satisfaction score is 17 points better than the RAV4 Hybrid's—probably because of the Prime's generous (for a plug-in hybrid) 42-mile electric-only driving range. And its score is a whopping 27 points ahead of the conventional RAV4's.

Similarly, 88 percent of Ford Maverick Hybrid owners would buy the fuel-efficient, value-priced compact pickup truck again, compared with 71 percent of owners of the conventional Maverick.

There are two exceptions: The Ford F-150 hybrid and the Lexus ES hybrid are tied with their conventionally powered siblings. In the case of the conventional F-150, owners liked the truck's power, fuel economy, and towing capacity from the two available turbo six-cylinder engines, while ES owners praised the car's roominess, reliability, and comfortable ride. Because all versions share these virtues, fuel economy doesn't tip the scale.

Entry-Level Luxury Still Disappoints

Looking at survey data over the years, we still see that after the honeymoon period with an entry-level luxury vehicle is over, owners quickly come to regret their

Most and Least Loved Brands

These charts represent the brands that most satisfy owners in specific areas: overall comfort, driving enjoyment, cabin storage, ease of use of the infotainment system, and ownership cost. Use them to find out which brands score highly in the qualities you care about the most. Then focus your search on brands that did well—and skip those that did poorly.

We also rank brands by their average "would buy again" score (see "Owner Satisfaction by Brand," on the facing page). The list reflects which automakers have a lineup that pleases owners across the board, those whose models are a mix of satisfaction hits and misses, and the ones with vehicles that consistently disappoint owners. Remember that owner satisfaction reflects whether a car meets a customer's expectations. The most satisfying cars aren't necessarily the best on the market, and vice versa.

COMFORT

Includes cabin noise, ride quality, and seat comfort, among other factors.

MOST SATISFYING	
Genesis	92
Ram	88
Acura	87
Lincoln	87
Porsche	87
BMW	85

LEAST SATISFYING	
Mini	63

DRIVING ENJOYMENT

Takes into account handling and acceleration.

MOST SATISFYING	
Porsche	96
Genesis	95
Tesla	94
BMW	93
Mini	88
Ram	88

LEAST SATISFYING	
Jeep	67

ICONS: ELIAS STEIN

purchase. Every luxury automaker, from Audi and Cadillac to Lincoln and Volvo, offers smaller, lower-priced models to appeal to new customers who might not be able to afford or might not need the size of the brand's midsized and large models. This year, the Mercedes-Benz GLA and GLB entry-level SUVs are among the lowest-scoring models in the survey. Numerous owners reported that they disliked Mercedes' complex, slow-to-respond, and frustrating-to-use infotainment and navigation systems. They are joined by the Infiniti QX50, the Japanese luxury brand's entry-level SUV.

Despite their luxury badges, these models don't perform any better in our tests than many less expensive, nonluxury SUVs. The entry-level models lack the luxurious ride and agile handling qualities found in the brands' more premium vehicles, and, while their interiors often present well, they don't have the refined details and quality materials to justify their comparatively high prices. Often, a high-trim version of a nonluxury model performs as well as or better than—and looks as nice as—these entry-level luxury models, and at a lower price.

The only model with a lower score than the unloved GLA, GLB, and QX50 isn't an entry-level luxury car. Only 38 percent of owners said they would buy the Volkswagen Atlas Cross Sport SUV again. But that's not surprising. The Atlas Cross Sport uses the same platform as the three-row Atlas SUV, which also has low owner satisfaction, but the shorter Cross Sport has only two rows of seats, a smaller cargo area, and less headroom in the front and rear.

CABIN STORAGE

Includes cup holders, and dashboard and center console storage, but does not include the trunk.

MOST SATISFYING	
Ram	79
Honda	76
Lincoln	75
GMC	74
Tesla	72
Acura	72

LEAST SATISFYING	
Audi	46

INFOTAINMENT

How easy it is to use the in-car electronics, including Bluetooth connections.

MOST SATISFYING	
Dodge	67
Tesla	65
Lincoln	64
BMW	63
GMC	62
Jeep	62

LEAST SATISFYING	
Infiniti	38

OWNERSHIP COST

Includes costs for fuel, insurance, maintenance, and repairs.

MOST SATISFYING	
Tesla	82
Hyundai	75
Toyota	73
Subaru	71
Mazda	70
Kia	69

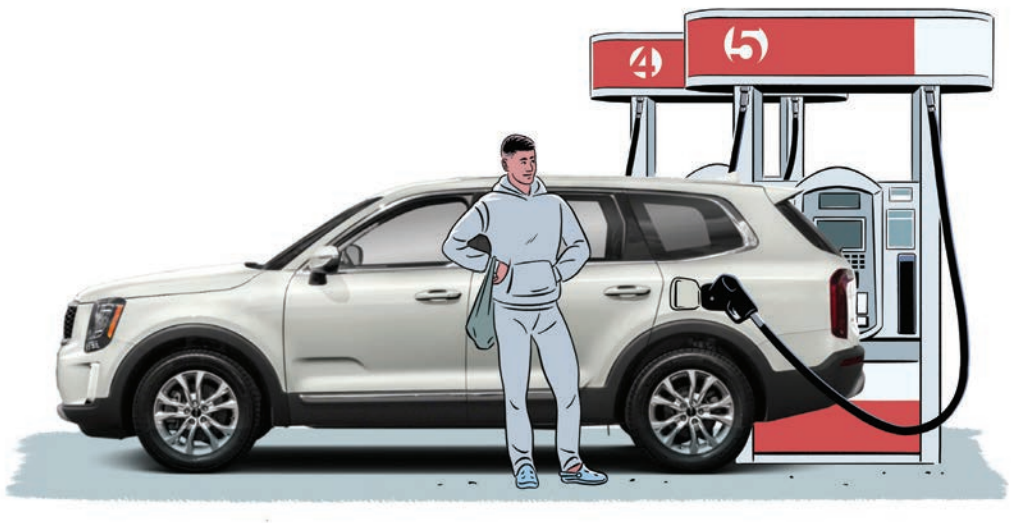
LEAST SATISFYING	
Ram	43

WORSE — BETTER

Owner Satisfaction by Brand

		SCORE
1	Porsche	83
2	Genesis	80
3	Tesla	78
4	BMW	73
5	Subaru	73
6	Lexus	72
7	Toyota	72
8	Dodge	71
9	Ford	70
10	Hyundai	70
11	Honda	70
12	Ram	70
13	Mini	69
14	Mazda	69
15	Chevrolet	68
16	Acura	67
17	Kia	66
18	Volvo	66
19	Buick	66
20	Audi	65
21	Lincoln	65
22	GMC	65
23	Jeep	63
24	Cadillac	59
25	Nissan	59
26	Mercedes-Benz	57
27	Volkswagen	56
28	Infiniti	50

Most and Least Satisfying Models in Their Class



While a model might not be among the top 10 (or even top 20) most satisfying in our survey, it still may excel in certain ways. We asked owners to rate how well their vehicles satisfy them when considering seat and cabin comfort, driving enjoyment, cabin storage, ease of use of the infotainment system, and ownership cost. Use their feedback and the corresponding scores to identify models that are likely to satisfy in the ways that matter most to you. For a full list of vehicles in all categories and their scores on each factor, go to **CR.org/satisfaction**.

HOW WE RATE SATISFACTION: Results are from the 2022 Annual Auto Surveys, involving more than 300,000 vehicles. Data from the 2020 to 2022 model years (plus a few 2023 models) were used, provided a vehicle wasn't significantly changed over that time. Some ratings might be based on a single model year. The owner satisfaction score is based on the percentage of owners who responded "definitely yes" to the question of whether they would buy the same vehicle if they had it to do all over again (considering price, performance, reliability, comfort, enjoyment, etc.). Ratings and scores for the factors were determined based on the percentage of owners who said they were very satisfied.

COMFORT

Jeep Grand Cherokee owners praised the SUV's great ride, and numerous Genesis GV70 owners noted the comfortable seats. Many Tacoma, GLB, Bolt, and Forte owners criticized their vehicles' seat comfort. Wrangler owners took issue with the noise and harshness of the SUV's ride.

MOST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS
Honda Ridgeline

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
Jeep Grand Cherokee

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Genesis GV70

ELECTRIC VEHICLES
Audi E-Tron

COMPACT CARS
Mazda3

LEAST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS
Toyota Tacoma

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
Jeep Wrangler

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Mercedes-Benz GLB

ELECTRIC VEHICLES
Chevrolet Bolt

COMPACT CARS
Kia Forte

DRIVING ENJOYMENT

Chevrolet Trailblazer owners liked the compact SUV's handling and acceleration, with one saying, "The car is fun to drive." Honda Civic owners liked the compact car's responsiveness and braking. Volkswagen Taos owners faulted the transmission, with one critical of the "extra hesitation upon acceleration."

MOST SATISFYING

COMPACT SUVs
Toyota RAV4 Prime

SUBCOMPACT SUVs
Chevrolet Trailblazer

COMPACT CARS
Honda Civic

MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS
Honda Ridgeline

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Porsche Macan

LEAST SATISFYING

COMPACT SUVs
Jeep Compass

SUBCOMPACT SUVs
Volkswagen Taos

COMPACT CARS
Nissan Kicks

MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS
Toyota Tacoma

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Infiniti QX50

CABIN STORAGE

Ford Maverick and Lincoln Aviator owners raved about storage space, but Audi Q7 SUV owners complained about no center console storage. A Polestar 2 owner summed up many complaints, commenting on "the lack of storage space for the smallest of things, such as sunglasses."

MOST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
Honda Passport

ELECTRIC VEHICLES
Tesla Model Y

HYBRID SUVs
Hyundai Tucson Hybrid

COMPACT PICKUP TRUCKS
Ford Maverick

LUXURY MIDSIZED SUVs
Lincoln Aviator

LEAST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
Jeep Wrangler

ELECTRIC VEHICLES
Polestar 2

HYBRID SUVs
Toyota Venza

COMPACT PICKUP TRUCKS
Hyundai Santa Cruz

LUXURY MIDSIZED SUVs
Audi Q7

INFOTAINMENT

Lincoln Corsair and Tesla Model X owners praised their cars' infotainment systems, but Volkswagen's new system in the ID.4 and GTI was universally panned. "The infotainment system is laggy, full of bugs, and overly complicated," said one owner, summarizing overwhelmingly negative owner sentiment.

MOST SATISFYING

SUBCOMPACT SUVs
Toyota Corolla Cross

FULL-SIZED PICKUP TRUCKS
GMC Sierra 3500HD

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Lincoln Corsair

SPORTS/SPORTY CARS
Chevrolet Corvette

ELECTRIC VEHICLES
Tesla Model X

LEAST SATISFYING

SUBCOMPACT SUVs
Volkswagen Taos

FULL-SIZED PICKUP TRUCKS
Toyota Tundra

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Lexus UX

SPORTS/SPORTY CARS
Volkswagen Golf GTI

ELECTRIC VEHICLES
Volkswagen ID.4

OWNERSHIP COST

Kia Telluride, Mazda MX-5 Miata, and Hyundai Tucson owners praised their cars' reliability, fuel economy, and value for the money. But owners of the Chevrolet Tahoe reported poor gas mileage and oil consumption, while multiple Porsche 911 owners wanted "lower service costs."

MOST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED 3-ROW/LARGE SUVs
Kia Telluride

MIDSIZED/LARGE CARS
Kia K5

SPORTS/SPORTY CARS
Mazda MX-5 Miata

COMPACT SUVs
Hyundai Tucson

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Lexus UX

LEAST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED 3-ROW/LARGE SUVs
Chevrolet Tahoe

MIDSIZED/LARGE CARS
Nissan Altima

SPORTS/SPORTY CARS
Porsche 911

COMPACT SUVs
Jeep Compass

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Mercedes-Benz GLA

WORSE — BETTER

Your Recall Questions Answered

TENS OF MILLIONS of cars are recalled each year because of safety issues including faulty headlights, software problems that can cause a car to stall, and fluid leaks that can lead to a fire. Automakers often uncover problems requiring recalls after receiving warranty claims, hearing complaints from dealers or owners, or when a worker or supplier uncovers a problem in the manufacturing process. Other times, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the agency that supervises safety recalls, investigates an issue after receiving complaints from the public. Some recalls include millions of vehicles, while others involve only a few dozen. "Every defect that leads to a safety recall puts people at risk and should be taken seriously," says William Wallace, associate director of safety policy at CR.

Below, we answer some of your most frequently asked questions about recalls.

How do I find out about recalls?

For recalls of all sizes, car companies must send official notices via first-class mail explaining any potential safety hazards and when and how owners can get the problem corrected. But these can go out weeks after a recall is announced and may not reach owners who have moved.

TIP: For timely alerts, sign up for a recall reminder service—such as CR's Recall Tracker (available to CR members)—or check your car through NHTSA's website (nhtsa.gov/recalls). You'll need your vehicle's VIN, a 17-digit combination of numbers and letters found at the bottom corner of the windshield on the driver's side of the car.

Can I still drive my car if it's subject to a recall?

Recalls may specify certain conditions under which it's unsafe to drive a recalled vehicle. In rare cases, such as the 2022 recall of certain Mercedes-Benz SUVs for potentially faulty brakes, automakers will issue a "do not drive" warning. If you've been directed not to drive your car, heed that directive: The vehicle has a serious problem that could put your life in danger.

TIP: If there's no "do not drive" warning for your car, it should be safe enough for you to drive to the dealership for repairs or use for other essential purposes, but you should get it fixed as soon as possible.

Do I have to pay for a recall-related repair?

Generally, no. Federal law requires free repairs for all safety recalls on cars up to 15 years old, and automakers and dealers may provide free safety recall repairs for cars older than that. (Most recall repairs can be addressed in an hour or two.)

TIP: If you've already paid to fix a defect that's later the reason for a recall, you may be eligible for a refund of the repair costs. The repair must have been completed within a specific time frame, and the reimbursement request must be filed soon after receiving a recall notice (sometimes as soon as 10 days).

Can a used car be sold with an open recall?

Yes. Federal law bans the sale of new cars with open recalls, but no similar law exists for used cars, leaving consumers on their own. If a used car has unrepaired recalls (to find out, enter its VIN at nhtsa.gov/recalls), try to get the necessary work done free of charge at a dealership before taking delivery. Otherwise, you'll need to have it done after the purchase.

TIP: Regardless of recalls, pay a trusted mechanic to inspect any used car before you buy it. The money will be well spent. If the previous owner neglected to get recall work done, they may have skipped maintenance and other repair issues, too.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

ROAD TEST

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER

COMPACT HYBRIDS

Kia Niro

Smart Hybrid Update

79
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 83

HIGHS Fuel economy, hatchback practicality, secure handling

LOWS Rear visibility, audio/climate control panel, road noise

POWERTRAIN 139-hp, 1.6-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine; 6-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

FUEL 45 mpg on regular

PRICE $26,490-$39,490 base price + $1,295 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $30,600

THE REDESIGNED NIRO hybrid benefits from improved handling, braking, and mpg. As before, its interior size and functionality rival that of a small SUV. Its biggest downside may simply be that it isn't available with all-wheel drive, unlike most SUVs.

In our tests, the Niro hybrid achieved a superb 45 mpg overall. (We'll also test the Niro EV.) There's a prompt and smooth electric surge from a stop, after which the powertrain seamlessly blends electric and gas power. We prefer the Niro's six-speed dual-clutch automatic over the continuously variable transmissions found in most hybrids, because it delivers a more natural feel. The Niro is far from a speed demon, but it's a second quicker from 0 to 60 mph than it was before.

We didn't like the steering's slightly disconnected, rubbery feel, but the Niro impressed with secure handling through our avoidance maneuver. It stopped well, too, which isn't always the case with hybrids. The ride is mostly compliant, but road noise is pronounced.

We like the comfortable front seat, but it's difficult to find a position without the steering wheel blocking the upper part of the instrument panel. The rear seat has tons of headroom and plenty of foot space.

The Niro has adopted Kia's annoying split-use climate/audio touchscreen panel that requires toggling back and forth between the systems. And the new "Aero Blade" rear roof pillar, in place of a third side window, makes for huge blind spots back there.

Standard features include AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, reverse automatic emergency braking, LDW, LKA, and lane centering assistance.

COMPACT SUVs

Honda CR-V

A Solid Choice but Short on Pizzazz

84
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 88

HIGHS Generous interior room, braking, simple controls, easy to get in and out

LOW Slightly underpowered

POWERTRAIN 190-hp, 1.5-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 26 mpg on regular

PRICE $31,110-$35,260 base price + $1,245 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $34,250

HONDA'S EVOLUTIONARY redesign of the CR-V retains this popular compact SUV's focus on functionality. We like that the ride comfort has improved and the controls are easier to use, but we're disappointed that fuel economy and acceleration have worsened, in part because the CR-V is now larger and heavier.

The 190-hp, turbocharged four-cylinder delivers unobtrusive propulsion when cruising around town, and the continuously variable transmission does a nice job keeping the engine revs low in those situations. However, if you need extra acceleration for climbing a hill or merging onto the highway, the CVT tends to allow the revs to soar quite high, and the engine takes on a gritty character above 4,500 rpm.

The ride errs on the firm side, but the taut suspension keeps things composed when the road gets rough. Responsive steering and well-controlled body roll make it feel capable and secure through curves.

Most of our drivers appreciated the front seats' ample contouring and good support, although some found the seat to be too narrow. All agreed that the rear seat is roomy and comfortable. The CR-V's boxy shape and large windows make for airy outward views.

Honeycomb-pattern dash vents spruce up what is otherwise a rather plain cabin, though overall it feels sturdy and well made. Controls are easy to use, thanks to physical dials, buttons, and knobs.

AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, LKA, lane centering assistance, adaptive cruise control, and automatic high beams all come standard.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

FIRST DRIVE

ULTRA-LUXURY ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Lucid Air

Streamlined Electric Rocket Ship

WE LIKE Long driving range, extra-quick DC fast charging, incredible acceleration, sharp handling, comfortable front seats

WE DON'T LIKE Electric motor whine, restricted visibility

POWERTRAIN 819-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct-drive transmission; all-wheel drive

RANGE 469 miles

PRICE $87,400-$169,000 base price + $1,650 destination charge
Total MSRP as driven $155,650

THE FIRST MODEL from California-based startup Lucid Motors is the Air, an ultra-luxury electric sedan. The Air has several things going for it, including the longest range of any EV yet, at more than 500 miles for the top version, and a 900-volt architecture that allows for exceptionally quick public DC fast charging. We rented an Air Grand Touring from Lucid for first impressions.

With 819 hp and all-wheel drive, the Air catapults down the road with breathtaking speed and seemingly never-ending thrust. Lucid needs to tone down the high-pitched motor whine that's apparent at low speeds, though.

Few big sedans can carve up a back road like the Air. It turns into corners with enthusiasm, has almost zero body roll, and feels utterly planted. The ride stays mostly smooth, though we were unimpressed with the way potholes punched through to the cabin during city driving.

The front seats are firm yet comfortable. The rear seat has generous headroom and knee room but is short on thigh support, and toe space is squished under the front seats. Thick roof pillars and chopped windows severely compromise outward views.

We don't like Lucid's method for adjusting the side mirrors and steering wheel, which requires a combination of the touchscreen and the controls on the wheel. Also, the bottom touchscreen, which handles the climate system, is too low and distracting to use.

AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, and LKA come standard. But it's disappointing that lane centering assistance (LCA) doesn't come standard, especially in light of the Air's steep base price.

FIRST DRIVE

COMPACT ELECTRIC SUVs

Nissan Ariya

Drives Well but Has Modest EV Tech

WE LIKE Quiet cabin, comfortable front seats

WE DON'T LIKE Some confusing controls, odd brake-pedal feel, cluttered rear visibility

POWERTRAIN 238-hp, electric motor; 1-speed direct-drive transmission; front-wheel drive

RANGE 289 miles

PRICE $43,190-$60,190 base price + $1,295 destination charge
Total MSRP as driven $56,680

NISSAN HAS FINALLY launched its second electric vehicle, the Ariya, more than a decade after the brand kick-started the idea of affordable EVs with the Leaf. We rented a pre-production front-wheel-drive Ariya ahead of purchasing an all-wheel-drive model for our test program. Here are our initial observations.

Buyers are likely to appreciate the Ariya's compact SUV size, comfortable front seats, and large cargo space. It also stands out for having a particularly quiet cabin, even among EVs. But its mediocre at-home and public DC fast-charging speeds place the Ariya merely midpack among current competitors.

With "only" 238 hp on tap, the front-drive Ariya doesn't deliver the rapid acceleration many EVs are known for—we'll probably have to wait for the 389-hp, AWD version for that. At least it feels reasonably light and nimble on its feet through corners. Ride quality is on the firm side, and the Ariya doesn't stay as composed over bumps as some rivals do.

We aren't fans of Nissan's "e-Step" regenerative braking mode. The brake pedal eerily moves toward the floor on its own when you let off the throttle, and it delivers a disconcertingly artificial feel with minimal travel when you do step on the pedal.

The interior has a neat minimalistic look. But the flush, touch-sensitive climate "buttons" are difficult to press without looking at them, and the seat-heater controls are annoyingly buried within the infotainment touchscreen.

AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, reverse automatic emergency braking, lane centering assistance, and automatic high beams come standard.

PHOTOS: LUCID; NISSAN

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **Big Gains** The redesigned Kia Niro delivers improved handling, braking, and mpg, while the new Honda CR-V benefits from a smoother ride and clearer controls.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results												Active Safety Features		
		Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Range, miles	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW + RCTW
HYBRIDS: $25,000-$35,000																		
✓ **Toyota Prius (2022)** 1.8H	85	⇈	^	81	52	590	– / –	^	^	^	–	^	53.5	10.3	135	S	S	O
✓ **Toyota Corolla** 1.8H	82	⇈	–	75	48	550	– / –	^	–	^	–	^	53.0	10.3	142	S	S	O
✓ **Kia Niro** 1.6H	79	–	^	83	45	500	^ / ^	^	–	–	–	–	55.0	8.9	133	S	S	S
✓ **Toyota Prius Prime (2022)** 1.8H+E	77	^	^	74	133 [1] / 50 [2]	590	^ / –	–	^	^	–	^	55.0	10.8	139	S	S	O
✓ **Hyundai Elantra** 1.6H	73	–	–	85	48	530	– / –	⇈	–	^	–	^	54.0	8.7	127	S	S	O
SUVs: $25,000-$40,000																		
✓ **Subaru Forester** 2.5L	87	^	^	90	28	465	^ / ⇈	⇈	–	^	^	^	53.0	9.2	130	S	S	O
✓ **Honda CR-V** 1.5T	84	^	^	88	26	360	^ / ⇈	⇈	^	^	–	^	54.0	8.8	129	S	S	S
✓ **Hyundai Tucson Hybrid** 1.6T+H	83	–	^	94	35	480	^ / ⇈	^	^	^	^	^	53.0	7.7	132	S	S	S
✓ **Nissan Rogue** 1.5T	81	^	v	81	25	360	^ / ^	⇈	^	–	^	^	56.0	9.1	134	S	S	S
✓ **Kia Sportage Hybrid** 1.6T+H	80	–	–	85	36	490	^ / ⇈	^	^	^	^	^	52.0	7.7	139	S	S	O
✓ **Mazda CX-50** 2.5L	78	^	–	78	24	375	^ / ^	–	^	–	^	^	53.0	9.3	131	S	S	S
✓ **Toyota RAV4 Hybrid** 2.5H	78	^	–	80	37	540	^ / ^	^	–	–	–	^	52.0	7.8	139	S	S	O
✓ **Hyundai Tucson** 2.5L	77	–	–	85	26	370	^ / ⇈	⇈	^	^	^	^	53.0	9.6	130	S	S	S
✓ **Mazda CX-5** 2.5L	77	^	–	77	24	370	^ / ^	–	^	^	^	^	54.0	8.6	133	S	S	S
✓ **Kia Sportage** 2.5L	74	–	v	77	25	355	^ / ⇈	^	^	^	^	^	55.5	10.0	134	S	S	O
✓ **Ford Escape Hybrid** 2.5H	73	–	–	85	34	485	– / ^	⇈	^	–	–	^	51.0	8.3	128	S	S	S
✓ **Mitsubishi Outlander** 2.5L	72	^	–	71	25	360	^ / ^	⇈	–	v	^	^	51.0	9.8	133	S	S	S
✓ **Toyota RAV4** 2.5L	72	^	v	73	27	395	^ / ^	^	v	–	–	^	54.0	8.3	131	S	S	O
✓ **Chevrolet Equinox** 1.5T	67	–	–	77	25	385	^ / ^	⇈	^	^	–	^	53.0	9.6	132	S	–	O
Volkswagen Tiguan 2.0T	59	v	v	84	25	380	^ / ⇈	^	^	^	^	^	52.0	10.3	131	S	S	O
Ford Escape 1.5T	59	v	v	74	26	405	– / ^	⇈	–	–	–	^	53.0	8.9	128	S	S	S
Ford Bronco Sport 1.5T	57	v	–	75	25	395	^ / ^	⇈	–	–	^	^	53.5	8.9	126	S	S	S

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: Recommended models did well in our **Overall Score,** which factors in **road-test results, predicted reliability, owner satisfaction,** and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, and blind spot warning. A dash (–) means no such safety system is offered; O means that it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes to prevent the vehicle from rolling away.

WORSE ⇊ v – ^ ⇈ BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

[1] Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe). [2] Miles per gallon while running on gas engine.

Index

THIS INDEX LISTS ALL THE ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN THE MAGAZINE OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS (INCLUDING THIS ISSUE). FOR INDEXES COVERING THE PAST FIVE YEARS, GO TO CR.ORG/5YEARINDEX.

A

Ad disclosures on social media ... Jan 23, 5
Aging in place ... Jan 23, 34
Air conditioners
  ratings ... Aug 22, 28
  window ... Jun 22, 12
Air fryers ... May 22, 18
  ratings ... May 22, 21
Antibiotic-resistant bacteria in meat ... Aug 22, 36
Appliances
  Brand Reliability Rankings ... Jul 22, 29
  kitchen
    for cool drinks ... Aug 22, 14
    induction cooking, ratings ... Nov 22, 20
    money-saving ... Oct 22, 11
Artificial Christmas trees ... Dec 22, 14
Audiobooks, free ... Nov 22, 13

AUTOMOBILE RATINGS

Acura Integra ... Oct 22, 61
Audi A3 ... May 22, 58
Audi Q4 E-Tron ... Feb 23, 57
BMW 2 Series Coupe ... Jul 22, 61
Ford F-150 Lightning ... Nov 22, 62; Feb 23, 57
Ford Maverick ... Jun 22, 58
  Hybrid ... Sep 22, 62
Genesis GV60 ... Dec 22, 58
Honda Civic Si ... May 22, 57
Honda CR-V ... Mar 23, 57
Honda HR-V ... Nov 22, 61
Hyundai Ioniq 5 ... Jun 22, 57
Infiniti QX60 ... Jun 22, 57
Jeep Grand Cherokee ... Jul 22, 60
Jeep Wagoneer ... Jun 22, 58
Kia EV6 ... Aug 22, 61
Kia Niro ... Mar 23, 57
Kia Sorento Hybrid ... Jul 22, 62
Kia Sportage ... Aug 22, 61
  Hybrid ... Oct 22, 61
Lexus NX350 ... Jul 22, 62
  NX350h ... Sep 22, 62
Lexus RX ... Feb 23, 58
Lucid Air ... Mar 23, 58
Mazda CX-50 ... Sep 22, 61
Mercedes-Benz C-Class ... Nov 22, 61
Mercedes-Benz EQS ... Oct 22, 62
Nissan Ariya ... Mar 23, 58
Nissan Rogue ... Aug 22, 62
Rivian RIT ... Dec 22, 59
Subaru BRZ ... Feb 23, 58
Subaru WRX ... Sep 22, 61
Toyota Corolla Cross ... May 22, 58
Toyota GR86 ... Nov 22, 62
Toyota Sequoia ... Oct 22, 62
Toyota Tundra ... Aug 22, 62
Volkswagen Golf GTI ... May 22, 57

AUTOMOBILES & AUTO EQUIPMENT

Acura MDX vs. Hyundai Palisade ... Jan 23, 15
Batteries, best value ... Nov 22, 60
BMW 5 Series vs. Genesis G80 ... Feb 23, 15
Brand Report Card ... Apr 22, 14
Buying tips
  essential questions ... Aug 22, 54
  new & used ... Apr 22, 22
Buying your leased car ... Dec 22, 57
Coming in 2022 ... Apr 22, 20
Crash prevention ... Mar 23, 5
Crash safety for women ... Sep 22, 5
Dash cams ... Jun 22, 56
Driver assistance systems
  best brands ... Oct 22, 54
Driver monitoring systems ... Apr 22, 28
Efficiency ... May 22, 5; Jun 22, 5
Electric vehicles ... Apr 22, 32; Aug 22, 60
  access to ... Nov 22, 5
Ford Maverick Hybrid vs.
Honda Ridgeline ... Oct 22, 13
Gas-saving tips ... Apr 22, 99
Hassle-free cars ... Sep 22, 54
Hybrids ... Nov 22, 54
  benefits of ... May 22, 56
  top-rated ... Nov 22, 57
Innovations timeline ... Feb 23, 12
Insurance
  fairness ... Oct 22, 5
  tips ... Jul 22, 60
Lexus NX vs. Mazda CX-5 ... Mar 23, 13
Low cost to own ... Sep 22, 60
Make your car last ... May 22, 50
New car features ... Feb 23, 50
New car reviews, 2022 ... Apr 22, 48
Owner satisfaction ... Mar 23, 50
  brand ratings ... Mar 23, 53
Ratings, 2022 ... Apr 22, 38
Recall FAQ ... Mar 23, 56
Reliability ... Apr 22, 86; Jan 23, 52
  2023 predictions ... Jan 23, 57
  brand comparisons ... Jan 23, 56
  ratings ... Apr 22, 88
Rivian RIT first drive ... Sep 22, 14
Sales practices ... Dec 22, 5
Smart buys, 2022 ... Apr 22, 16
Tire ratings ... Dec 22, 54
Top Picks for 2022 ... Apr 22, 8
Used cars ... Apr 22, 82; Jun 22, 50
  financing ... Feb 23, 56
  how to spot damage ... Jan 23, 59
  reliable models ... Oct 22, 60

B–D

Banking ... Mar 23, 44
Bicycle locks ... Oct 22, 12
Bouquets ... May 22, 14
Boxed wine ... Jul 22, 13
Brainpower ... Jun 22, 22
Broadband internet ... Feb 23, 5
Butter ... Feb 23, 16
Button battery safety ... Nov 22, 5
Buy now, pay later loans ... Mar 23, 5; Mar 23, 12
"Buyer Aware" book ... Jan 23, 5
  excerpt ... Oct 22, 40
Candy timeline ... Oct 22, 12
Carry-on luggage ratings ... Aug 22, 52
Cheese ... Nov 22, 34
Chicken, salmonella contamination ... Aug 22, 30; Oct 22, 5; Jan 23, 5
Chocolate ... May 22, 12
  dark, heavy metals in ... Feb 23, 34
Christmas trees, artificial ... Dec 22, 14
Cleaning tips ... May 22, 11
Cleaning tools ... May 22, 11
  floor ... Jan 23, 16
Clogged drains ... Aug 22, 13
Coffee makers ... Jan 23, 18
  ratings ... Jan 23, 22
Coffee timeline ... Jan 23, 12
Consumer protection legislation ... Aug 22, 5
Cooking oils ... Oct 22, 34
Cookware ... Jun 22, 44
  induction, ratings ... Nov 22, 23
  timeline ... Jun 22, 12
Coupons & deals ... Feb 23, 42
COVID-19, long-COVID recovery ... Oct 22, 46
Crackers ... Dec 22, 16
Credit cards ... May 22, 44
Credit report access ... Dec 22, 5
Cutting boards ... Sep 22, 52
Dark chocolate, heavy metals in ... Feb 23, 34
Data privacy ... Aug 22, 5; Nov 22, 5
  cookies ... Jan 23, 15
Dental care ... Sep 22, 34
Desk chairs ... Sep 22, 16
Detergents, laundry ... Nov 22, 11
Doorbell cameras ... Sep 22, 15
Drain clogs ... Aug 22, 13
Drugs, shopping online ... May 22, 22

E–G

E-bike battery safety ... Mar 23, 5
Electric toothbrush ratings ... Mar 23, 23
Elliptical trainers ... Feb 23, 18
  ratings ... Feb 23, 23
Emails, unwanted, deleting in Gmail ... Aug 22, 14
Estate planning ... Jul 22, 32
Exercise equipment ... Feb 23, 18
  ratings ... Feb 23, 22
Financial planners ... Nov 22, 46
Fire safety ... Sep 22, 40
  backyard ... Nov 22, 12
Food, store brands ... Jan 23, 42
Food safety ... May 22, 5
  meat ... Aug 22, 30
"Forever chemicals" ... Dec 22, 5
  in food packaging ... May 22, 36; Jun 22, 5
  in water ... Sep 22, 5
Gardening tools ... Jul 22, 14
Gifts, kitchen ... Dec 22, 11
Green home timeline ... Jul 22, 12
Green home tips ... Jul 22, 22
Greenhouse gas emissions disclosure ... Oct 22, 5
Grills ... Jun 22, 11
Groceries, saving money ... Jan 23, 42; Feb 23, 42

H–K

Hair dryers ... Jan 23, 12
Hamburgers
  cooking safety ... Aug 22, 39
  how to grill ... Jun 22, 11
Heat survival guide ... Aug 22, 22
  timeline ... Aug 22, 12
Heavy metals in dark chocolate ... Feb 23, 34
Hedge trimmers ... Oct 22, 15
Herbs, growing your own ... Jun 22, 13
Home, age-proofing ... Jan 23, 34
Home heating tips ... Dec 22, 38
Home organizing ... May 22, 30
  timeline ... May 22, 12
Home safety
  hazards ... Nov 22, 24
  timeline ... Mar 23, 12
Home security ... Mar 23, 24
Homeowners insurance ratings ... Mar 23, 33
Hot dogs, vegetarian ... Sep 22, 13
Humidifiers ... Dec 22, 15
Ice cream, vegan ... Aug 22, 18
  ratings ... Aug 22, 20
Induction cooking ... Nov 22, 18
  appliance ratings ... Nov 22, 20
Infant sleep product safety ... May 22, 5; Aug 22, 5
  CR investigation ... Oct 22, 40
Insect repellents ... Aug 22, 40
  ratings ... Aug 22, 45
Insurance fairness ... Oct 22, 5
Keeping warm
  timeline ... Dec 22, 12
  top picks ... Feb 23, 12
Kitchen appliances, space-saving ... May 22, 16
Kitchen gifts ... Dec 22, 11
Knife sharpeners ... Sep 22, 51
Knives ... Sep 22, 46

L–P

Laptops ... Dec 22, 18
  accessories ... Dec 22, 21
  ratings ... Dec 22, 22
Laundry
  detergents ... Nov 22, 11
  washer-dryer pairs ... Jun 22, 15
Lawn tools ... Jul 22, 14
Leftovers, reheating tips ... Jan 23, 14
Lightbulbs ... Sep 22, 12
Long-COVID recovery ... Oct 22, 46
Luggage ... Mar 23, 11
  carry-on ratings ... Aug 22, 52
Mattresses ... Feb 23, 26
  ratings ... Feb 23, 32
Meat
  antibiotic resistant bacteria in ... Aug 22, 36
  plant-based ... Jun 22, 30
    ratings ... Jun 22, 36
  safety ... Aug 22, 30
Meat thermometers ... Jan 23, 11
Medical bills, surprise ... Jun 22, 38
Medicare ... Dec 22, 46
  Advantage plan ... Dec 22, 50
  Part D drug plan ... Dec 22, 49
Money saving ... Sep 22, 24
  timeline ... Sep 22, 12
Oils, cooking ... Oct 22, 34
Organic food ... Jul 22, 38
Outdoor space accessories ... Aug 22, 11
Painting, interior ... Oct 22, 18
  paint ratings ... Oct 22, 23
  tools ... Oct 22, 21
Pasta sauces ... Mar 23, 34
  ratings ... Mar 23, 38
Personalized pricing ... Jun 22, 5
Pet trackers ... May 22, 15
Photographs & keepsakes
  preserving ... Nov 22, 40
  timeline ... Nov 22, 12
Pickleball paddles ... Mar 23, 16
Pillows ... Feb 23, 29
  ratings ... Feb 23, 33
Plant milks ... Sep 22, 11
Prescriptions, shopping online ... May 22, 22
Pumpkin carving tips ... Oct 22, 16

R–S

Range ratings ... Feb 23, 14
Record player maintenance ... Jul 22, 15
Red No. 3 dye ... Feb 23, 5
Retirement planning ... Nov 22, 52
Road trips ... Jul 22, 54
Salmonella in chicken ... Aug 22, 30; Oct 22, 5
Sausages, vegetarian ... Sep 22, 13
Saving money ... Sep 22, 24
  timeline ... Sep 22, 12
Shoe comfort ... Jul 22, 12
Shopping tips
  coupons & deals ... Feb 23, 42
Shopping tips, thrift sites ... Aug 22, 12
Shower heads ... Mar 23, 15
Sleep ... Feb 23, 24
Smart speakers ... Jul 22, 18
  ratings ... Jul 22, 21
  tips ... Jul 22, 20
Smartphones
  under $700 ... Jun 22, 18
    ratings ... Jun 22, 21
  battery tips ... Dec 22, 13
  if lost ... May 22, 13
  protecting from damage ... Feb 23, 15
Smoothies, healthy ... Jun 22, 14
Social media ad disclosures ... Jan 23, 5
Soups ... Nov 22, 14
Store brands, food ... Jan 23, 42
Streaming services ... Oct 22, 24
  device ratings ... Oct 22, 33
Stroller safety ... Feb 23, 5
Student loan relief ... Jul 22, 5
Sunscreens ... Jul 22, 44
  ratings ... Jul 22, 51
Supplements ... Jan 23, 24
Surprise medical bills ... Jun 22, 38
Sustainability at home ... Jul 22, 22

T–W

Tablets ... Sep 22, 18
  accessories ... Sep 22, 20
  ratings ... Sep 22, 22
Tech industry fairness ... Jul 22, 5
Ticket sales ... Sep 22, 5
Tooth care ... Mar 23, 18
Toothbrushes, electric, ratings ... Mar 23, 23
Top product picks ... Dec 22, 24
Toxin testers ... Mar 23, 40
Trader Joe's snacks ... Mar 23, 14
Travel ... Aug 22, 46
  carry-on luggage ratings ... Aug 22, 52
  warehouse club deals ... Nov 22, 15
Treadmills ... Feb 23, 18
  ratings ... Feb 23, 22
Turntable maintenance ... Jul 22, 15
TVs
  mounting ... Jun 22, 16
  picture settings ... Feb 23, 11
Unwanted emails, deleting in Gmail ... Aug 22, 14
Vacuums ... May 22, 11
Vegan ice cream ... Aug 22, 18
  ratings ... Aug 22, 20
Vegetables, healthier when cooked ... Oct 22, 14
Vegetarian sausages ... Sep 22, 13
Video doorbells ... Sep 22, 15
Waffles ... Jul 22, 16
Walk accessories ... Jul 22, 11
Wallets ... Aug 22, 16
Washer-dryer pairs ... Jun 22, 15
Water
  "forever chemicals" in ... Sep 22, 5; Dec 22, 5
Wills ... Jul 22, 32
Wine, boxed ... Jul 22, 13
Winter driving tips ... Dec 22, 52
Winter storm prep ... Dec 22, 43

Can You (Really) Read the Signs?

There's some seriously mixed-up messaging happening out there.

Whose Hardware Store Is This, Anyway?
Looks like there's a power struggle over some power tools.
Submitted by Kevin Mattimore, via email

An Open and Shut Case
Hey, don't let that locked door stop you.
Submitted by Joe Hauser, Cupertino, CA

Thirsty? Think Again.
You definitely shouldn't drink from these water fountains.
Submitted by Jim Richardson, via email

Let's Get Lost
You're going to need a map (or Waze) for this one.
Submitted by Del Allen, Columbus, OH

SHARE

Be on the lookout for goofs and glitches like these. Share them with us—by email at **SellingIt@cro.consumer.org** or by mail to Selling It, Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703—and we might publish yours. Please include key information, such as your name and location.

Timely Advice & Tips Delivered Straight to Your Inbox

Sign up for CR's **FREE** email newsletters, each packed with the information you need to shop smart, stay informed, and keep safe.

What's New

Smarter

Home

Cars

ShopSmart®

Health

Food

Money

Salud y Bienestar

Digital Privacy

cr.org/getnewsletters

CR

CRM33C4N